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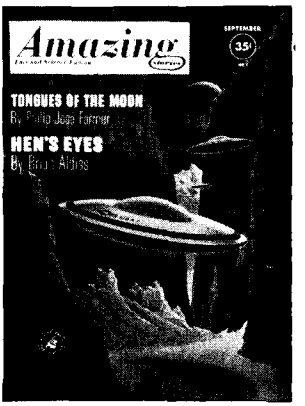

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FANTASTIC
STORIES OF IMAGINATION

SEPTEMBER 1961
Volume 10 Number 9

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

Publisher
MICHAEL MICHAELSON

Editorial Director
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CELE GOLDSMITH

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Cover: ALEX SCHOMBURG

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ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY, One Park Avenue, New York 16, New York. William Ziff, President; W. Bradford Briggs, Executive Vice President; Michael Michaelson, Vice President and Circulation Director; Hershel B. Sarbin, Vice President and General Manager; M. T. Birmingham, Jr., Vice President and Business Manager; Charles Housman, Financial Vice President; Richard Kislik, Treasurer.

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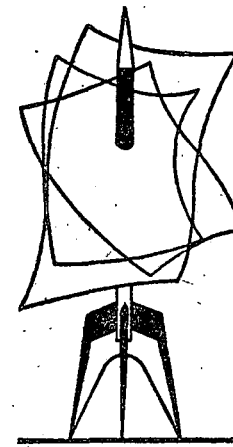

EDITORIAL

NOT MANY responsible scientists seem to think we will ever really communicate with the inhabitants of another planet or system or galaxy. They offer many theories for this, most of which are fairly standard stock in the trade of the science-fiction fan. For example: 1) the unlikelihood of another intelligent race maturing at the same moment in the cosmic time-stream as Man has matured; or, 2) the seeming impossibility of finding an energy emission powerful enough to cross an infinity of light-years; or 3) the probability that other intelligent beings would be using a form of communication energy as far superior to ours as ours is, say, to an Indian's smoke signals; or, 4) the argument that Somebody has been beaming messages to us for millions of years, and got tired and gave up just when *we* developed enough to construct listening devices.

In the light of all this theorizing, it is interesting that scientists still bother to figure out devices whereby we *could* exchange evidences of intelligence with another race if we ever *did* contact them. Recently, Cornell physicist Philip Morrison advanced the theory that inter-galactic television would be the best way to do it.

THE first move, he said, would be to set up an electronic system of conveying simple arithmetic: a string of square wave-forms to represent numbers, and odd wave-forms to represent the processes of addition, subtraction, etc. Once Ka P'nol, chief scientist of Whoosh, indicated he agreed with us that two plus two equals four, Morrison's next move would be to transmit the symbol for pi, a universal constant. But here Morrison shows his originality. Your ordinary scientist might wait and see if Ka P'nol's answer could carry pi out to its umpty-umpth decimal place. Not Morrison. He would send a number of short "lines" or radio waves, punctuated at beginning and end by a spiked pulse. By interspersing the symbol for pi in the form of a square wave, Ka P'nol's boys could, if smart enough,

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SHIP OF DARKNESS

By A. E. van VOGT

Introduction by Sam Moskowitz

THE term "Modern Science Fiction" tightly used has come to mean the stories published since 1940. Many outstanding authors rose to prominence in that period but few have been more colorful or gained greater popularity than A. E. van Vogt. Obviously impressed by Don A. Stuart's (John W. Campbell) masterpiece Who Goes There? *he made his first reputation with a series of stories giving a variation on the theme in* Black Destroyer, Discord in Scarlet *and* Vault of the Beast. *His novel* Slan *about the problems of survival of the super race of the future literally created a sensation in the science fiction world when first serialized and its title became part of the slang of the literature.* The Weapon Shop *and its sequel* The Weapon Makers *showed the future as a solar monarchy with all the intrigues of the kingdoms*

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of the past carried forward with the weapons and methods of the future and incited readers to new enthusiasms. Not too long afterward, a heroic attempt to write a science fiction novel around a core of semantics, The World of Null A, *received an uneven response as to quality but a figurative uproar of debate regarding its subject matter. There were others, but it was obvious that an author who could throw so many literary bombs into a fundamentally imaginative medium was going to be very much in demand. The book publishers have methodically put nearly everything written by van Vogt into hard covers or paper back. Van Vogt has spent more time revising groups of his short stories into "novels" than he devoted to writing them in the first place. Very little that is new has come from his typewriter in the last decade.* Ship of Darkness *is a novelty because it is a good story of van Vogt's which has only had limited distribution and which has never been collected in book form. Originally it was published in a magazine called* Fantasy Book *which enjoyed newsstand circulation only in a few localities in California. It is doubtful if even a thousand copies of the 1947 issue No. 2 of that magazine, in which* Ship of Darkness *was featured, was ever sold. As far as the overwhelming majority of science fiction readers are concerned, its appearance here in this issue virtually constitutes the publication of a new story by A. E. van Vogt.*

IT WAS different, D'Ormand realized, deciding on earth to do something. And actually doing it in intergalactic space. For six months, he had headed out from the solar system, away from the gigantic spiralled wheel that was the main galaxy. And now the moment had come to take his plunge into time.

A little shakily D'Ormand set the dials of the time machine for 3,000,000 A.D. And then, his hand on the activator, he hesitated. According to Hollay, the rigid laws that controlled the time flow on planets would be lax and easy to escape from, here in this sunless darkness. First of all, Hollay had said, accelerate the ship to maximum velocity, and so put the ultimate possible strain on the fabric of space. Then act.

Now! D'Ormand thought, sweating. And pushed the plunger hard. There was a sickening jar, a steely screeching of wrenched metal. And then again the steady feel of flight.

D'Ormand's vision was swimming. But he was aware, as he

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shook the dizziness out of his head, that he would be able to see again in a moment. He smiled with the grim tenseness of a man who has risked his life successfully.

Sight came abruptly. Anxious, D'Ormand bent towards the time machine control board. And then drew back, shocked. It wasn't there.

He looked around, incredulous. But his was no big ship, requiring detailed scrutiny. It was one room with an engine, a bunk, fuel tanks and a galley. Nothing could be hidden in it. *The time machine wasn't there.*

That was the metal tearing sound he had heard, the machine wrenching itself off into time, leaving the ship behind. He had failed. He was still groaning inwardly when a movement caught the corner of his eye. He turned with a painful jerk of his body. High in the viewing plate he saw the dark ship.

ONE look; and D'Ormand knew that, whatever the reason for the time machine's departure, it had *not* failed.

The ship was close to him. So close that at first he thought it was the nearness which made it visible. And then, the eerie reality of its lightless state penetrated. He stared, and the first fascination roared into his mind. the first realization that this must be a craft of the year 3,000,000 A.D.

Fascination faded before a thrill of doubt that gathered into a blank dismay. Abruptly, it wasn't only the fact that he could see it that was unnatural. There was the ship itself.

Out of some nightmare that ship might have sailed. At least two miles long, half a mile wide, a foot thick, it was a craft fit only for such a darksome sea as space itself. It was a platform floating in the night of interstellar emptiness.

And on that broad deck, men and women stood. Naked they were, and nothing at all, no barrier however flimsy, protected their bodies from the cold of space. They couldn't be breathing in that airless void. Yet they lived.

They lived, and they stood on that broad dark deck. And they looked up at him, and beckoned. And called. The strangest call it was that had ever come to a mortal man. It was not a thought, but something deeper, stronger, more moving. It was like a sudden body-realization of thirst or hunger. It grew like a craving for drugs.

He must land his spaceship on the platform. He must come down and be one of them. He must . . . primitive, unrestrained, terrible desire . . .

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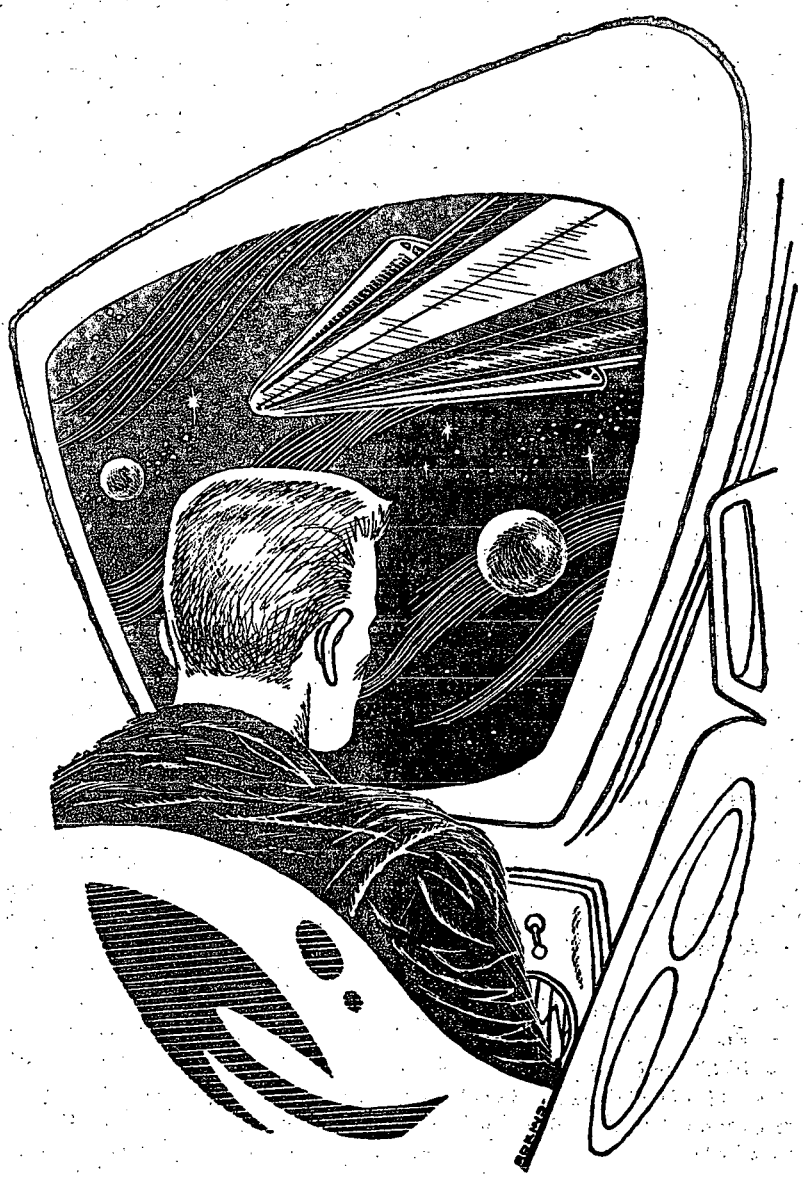

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With a rush, the spaceship glided to a landing. Immediately, with the same terrible urge, his desire was for sleep.

D'Ormand had time for one desperate thought of his own. Got to fight, came that flash of inner warning. Got to leave, leave. At once. Sleep came in the middle of horrendous fear.

SILENCE! He was lying with eyes closed in a world that was as still as—

D'Ormand couldn't find a mental comparison. There wasn't any. There wasn't anything in his entire existence that could match the intense stillness, the utter absence of sound that pressed against him like—Once again there was no comparison. There wasn't any pressure. There was only the silence.

Strange, he thought: and the first remote impulse came to open his eyes. The impulse faded; and there remained in his mind the measured conviction that surely he, who had spent so many months alone in a spaceboat, must know the full meaning of silence.

Except that in the past there had been the faint *sshhh sshhh* of the inhalation and exhalation of his breathing, the occasional sucking sound of his lips on a tube of nourishing soup, and the movements of his body. This was —what?

His brain wouldn't make a definition. D'Ormand opened his eyes. At first, sight offered the barest variation of impression. He was lying partly on his side, partly on his back. Nearby, blotting out the stars, was a torpedo-shaped blob about thirty feet long and twelve feet high. Aside from that there wasn't anything in his line of vision but stars and the darkness of space.

Normal enough. He had no fear. His mind and its life seemed far away. Memory was an even remoter adjunct. But after a moment there trickled to the surface of his will the desire to place his physical position relative to his surroundings.

There had been, he remembered weightily, a dark ship. Then sleep. Now stars and interstellar night. He must still be sitting in the control chair gazing at the viewing plate and the vista of heavens it revealed.

But—D'Ormand frowned mentally—he wasn't sitting. He was lying on his back, staring up, *up* . . . at a skyfull of stars and at a blob of something that looked like another spaceboat.

With an owl-like detachment, his brain argued against that impression. Because his was the only earth spaceship in that part of the universe. There couldn't be a second ship. Just like that D'Ormand was on his feet. He had no consciousness of getting

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up. One instant he was sprawling on his back. Now he was standing, swaying . . .

HE was standing on a broad deck beside his spaceboat. The deck, everything, was plainly visible in a dim fashion for its entire length and width. And all around him, near and far, were naked men and women standing, sitting, lying down, paying him not the slightest heed.

He was clawing—clawing with senseless fingers at the air lock of the spaceboat, striving to tear it open by strength alone.

After a mindless period of time, his spaceman's training began to dictate those automatic, desperate movements of his body. He grew aware that he was studying the lock mechanism anxiously, tugging at it gingerly, testingly. Then he was stepping back, surveying the small ship as a whole.

Out of some unplumbed reserve of calm there came to D'Ormand at last the will and the ability to walk quietly around the spaceboat and peer in at the portholes. The inside was a dim well of familiar mechanisms and metal shapes, the sight of which brought a spasm of returning frenzy, easier to fight this time.

He stood finally very still, holding his mind clear of extraneous ideas, thinking one simple, straightforward thought, a thought so big that all his brain was needed to hold it, to balance it, and comprehend the immense reality of it.

And it grew harder, not easier, to grasp that he was on the platform ship. His brain started to twist, to dart off in streaks of doubt and fear and disbelief. But always it came back. It had to. There was no sane elsewhere for it to go. And there was nothing, utterly nothing to do but wait here until his captors showed by action what further fate they intended for him.

He sat down. And waited.

An hour at least went by, an hour like no other in the history of his world: a man from 2975 A. D. watching a scene on a space liner of thirty thousand centuries later.

The only thing was, and it took the whole hour for the fact to sink in, there wasn't anything to watch except the incredible basic scene itself. Nobody did anything. Nobody seemed to be remotely aware that he was on the ship. Occasionally in the dimness a man strolled by, a figure that moved against the low-hung stars, plainly visible as was the whole dark deck and its cargo of superhuman beings.

But no one came to satisfy his growing lust, his *need* for information. With a tingling shock the realization came finally to

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D'Ormand that he must make the approach himself, force the issue by personal action.

Abruptly, he felt astounded that he had half-lain, half sat there while the precious minutes flowed by. He must have been completely dazed, and no wonder.

But that was over. In a burst of determination, he leaped to his feet. And then, shaking, he hesitated. Was he actually intending to approach one of the crew of this ship of night, and ask questions by thought transference?

It was the alien-ness that scared him. These people weren't human. After three million years, their relation to him had no more meaning than that of the ape of his own day that shared his ancestry.

THREE million years, 16 x 10^{10} minutes; and every few seconds of that inconceivable span of time, somebody has been born, somebody else had died, life had gone on in its tremendous, terrifying fashion until here, after unthinkable eons, was the ultimate man. Here was evolution carried to such limits that space itself had been conquered by some unguessable and stupendous development of biological adaptation—stupendous but so simple, that in a single sleep period he, a stranger, had been miraculously transformed into the same state.

D'Ormand's thought paused there. He felt a sudden uneasiness, a sharp disturbing consciousness that he couldn't possibly have the faintest idea how long he had been asleep. It could have been years, or centuries. Time did not exist for a man who slept.

It seemed abruptly more important than ever to discover what all this was about. His gaze came to rest on a man a hundred feet away, walking slowly.

He reached the moving figure; and then, at the last instant, he shrank back in dismay. Too late. His hand, thrusting forth, had touched the naked flesh.

The man turned, and looked at D'Ormand. With a contorted gesture, D'Ormand let go of that unresisting arm. He cringed from eyes that blazed at him like points of flame stabbing through slitted holes.

Curiously, it wasn't the demoniac quality of the gaze itself that sent waves of fear surging along D'Ormand's nerves. It was the soul that peered from those burning eyes—a strange, alien spirit that stared at him with an incomprehensible intensity.

Then the man turned, and walked on.

D'Ormand was trembling. But after a moment he knew that he couldn't hold back. He didn't let himself think about it,

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just walked forward and fell into step beside the tall, enigmatic stroller. They walked on, past groups of men and women. And now that he was moving among them, D'Ormand noticed a fact that had previously escaped him. The women outnumbered the men three to one. At least.

The wonder about that passed. He and his companion strolled on in that strangest of promenades. They skirted the edge of the ship. Forcing himself to be casual, D'Ormand stepped to one side, and stared down into an abyss that stretched a billion light years deep.

He began to feel better. He ransacked his mind for some method of bridging the mental gulf between himself and the dark stranger. He thought: It must have been telepathy they had used to compel him to land his spaceship. If he concentrated around an idea now, he might receive an answer.

The train of thought ended because at that point he noticed, not for the first time, that he was still clothed. But suddenly he thought of it from the angle: *they* had left him dressed. What was the psychology?

He walked on, his mind blank, head bent, watching his trousered legs and, beside him, the naked legs of the thin man pumping along steadily.

JUST when the first impression gan to steal into him, D'Ormand was only vaguely aware, so gradually they came. There was a thought about the hour of battle drawing near; and that he must prove himself worthy before then, and so live forever on the ship. Otherwise, he would suffer the exile.

It was like a quantum. One instant he was only dimly conscious of that alien blur of ideas. The next his mind made a frantic jump to the new comprehension of his position.

The effect of the warning grew stronger. In abrupt shock of fear, D'Ormand headed for his spaceboat. He was tugging at the impassive entrance before the realization penetrated with finality that it offered no means of escape. Exhausted, he sank down on the deck. He became amazed at the extent of his fright. But there was no doubt of the cause. He had received information and a warning. A gelid, a bleak and steel-like warning: He must adjust to the ways of this ship before some fantastic battle was joined and, having proved worthy, live here forever.

. . . Forever! It was that part of the idea that had for solid minutes staggered the fulcrums of his reason. The mood yielded to the dark drift of minutes. It seemed suddenly impossible that

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he had understood correctly the tiny tide of ideas that had been directed at him. A battle coming up. That was senseless. Be worthy, or suffer exile! Suffer what? D'Ormand wracked his brain, but the meaning came again: Exile! It could mean death, he decided finally with a cold logic.

He lay, his face twisted into a black frown. He felt violently angry at himself. What a stupid fool he had been, losing his nerve in the middle of a successful interview.

It *had* been successful. Information had been asked for, and given. He should have held his ground, and kept his mind clenched, concentrated on a hundred different questions in turn: Who were they? Where was the ship going? What was the drive mechanism of the great platform liner? Why were there three women to one man?

The thought trailed. In his intensity, he had jerked into a partial sitting position—and there not more than five feet away was a woman.

D'ORMAND sank slowly back to the deck. He saw that the woman's eyes were glowing at him unwinkingly. After a minute, uneasy, D'Ormand turned over on his back. He lay tense, staring up at the bright circle of the galaxy he had left, so long ago now. The points of light that made up the glorious shining swirl seemed farther away than they had ever been.

The life he had known, of long swift trips to far planets, of pleasurable weeks spent in remote parts of space, was unreal now. And even farther away in spirit than it was in time and space.

With an effort, D'Ormand roused himself. This was no time for nostalgia. He had to get it into his head that he faced a crisis. The woman hadn't come merely to look at him. Issues were being forced, and he must meet them. With abrupt will, he rolled over and faced the woman again. For the first time, he appraised her.

She was rather pleasing to look at. Her face was youthful, shapely. Her hair was dark. It needed combing, but it wasn't very thick, and the tousled effect was not unpretty. Her body—

D'Ormand sat up. Until that instant, he hadn't noticed the difference between her and the others. She was dressed. She had on a long, dark, form-fitting gown, made incongruous by the way her bare feet protruded from the voluminous skirt.

Dressed! Now there could be no doubt. This was for him. But what was he expected to do?

Desperate, D'Ormand stared at the woman. Her eyes were

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like dead jewels staring back at him. He felt a shaken wonder: What incredible thoughts were going on behind those shining windows of her mind? They were like closed doors beyond which was a mental picture of a world three million years older than his own.

The idea was unsettling. Queer little twisting movements blurred along his nerves. He thought: Woman was the nodal, man the anodal. All power grew out of their relationship, especially as the anodal could set up connections with three or more nodal.

D'Ormand forced his mind to pause there. Had he thought that? Never.

A jerky thrill made a circuit through him. For once more, the strange neural method of communication of these people had stolen upon him unawares. And this time he knew that one or four women could form a relationship with a man. Which seemed to explain why there were so many women.

His excitement began to drain. So what? It still didn't explain why this woman was here so near him. Unless this was some fantastic offer of marriage.

D'Ormand studied the woman again. There came to him finally the first sardonicism he had known in months. Because after twelve years of evading the enticements of marriageable young women, he was caught at last. There was no such thing as not verifying that this woman had come over to marry him.

The man's threats had made preternaturally clear that he was working under a time limit. He crept over, took her in his arms, and kissed her. In crises, he thought, action must be straightforward, un-selfconscious, without guile.

AFTER a moment he forgot that. The woman's lips were soft and passive. There was no resistance in them, nor, on the other hand, was there any awareness of the meaning of the kisses. Putting his lips to hers was like caressing a small child; the same immeasurable innocence was there.

Her eyes, so near his own now, were lighted pools of uncomprehending non-resistance, of passivity so great that it was abnormal. Immensely clear it was that this young woman had never even heard of kisses. Her eyes glowed at him with an alien indifference—that ended.

Amazingly, it ended. Those pools of light widened, grew visibly startled. And she drew away, a quick, lithe movement that carried her in some effortless fashion all the way to her feet. Instantly, she turned and walked off. She became a shad-

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owy figure that did not look back.

D'Ormand stared after her uneasily. There was a part of him that wanted to take ironic satisfaction out of the rout he had inflicted. But the conviction that the defeat was his grew with each passing second. It was he who was working against time. And his first attempt to adjust to the life of the dark ship was a failure.

Uneasiness faded, but did not go away entirely. And D'Ormand made no effort to push it further. It was well to remember that he had had a warning. A warning that either meant something or didn't. Folly to assume that it didn't.

He lay back, his eyes closed. He was not reacting well. An entire period he had been within the pure life of Iir, and still he was not becoming attuned.

Eh! D'Ormand started. He hadn't thought that.

He jerked up, opening his eyes. Then he shrank back. Fire-eyed men stood in a rough circle around him. He had no time to wonder how they had gathered so quickly.

They acted. One of them put out his hand. Out of nothingness a knife flashed into it, a knife that glowed in every element of its long blade. Simultaneously, the others leaped forward, grabbed D'Ormand, and held him. Instantly, that *living* knife plunged down towards his breast.

He tried to shriek at them. His mouth, his face and throat-muscles worked in convulsive pantomine of speech, but no sounds came. The airless night of space mocked his human horror.

D'Ormand shrank in a stark anticipation of agony, as that blade ripped through his flesh and began to cut. There was no pain, not even sensation. It was like dying in a dream, except for the realism of his writhing and jerking, and at the same time, he watched with a dazed intensity the course of the knife.

They took out his heart; and D'Ormand glared at it like a madman as one of the demon-things held it in his hand, and seemed to be examining it.

Insanely, the heart lay in the monster's palm, lay there beating with a slow, steady pulse.

D'Ormand ceased struggling. Like a bird fascinated by the beady eyes of a snake, he watched the vivisection of his own body.

They were, he saw at last with a measure of sanity, putting each organ back as soon as they had looked at it. Some they studied longer than others—and there was no doubt finally that improvements had been achieved.

Out of his body came knowledge. Even in that first moment, he had a dim understanding that

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the only drawback to perfect reception of the knowledge now was that he was translating it into thoughts. The information was all emotion. It tingled along his nerves, titillated with subtle inflections, promised a million strange joys of existence.

SLOWLY, like an interpreter who understands neither language, D'Ormand transformed that wonderous flow into mind-forms. It changed as he did so. The brilliance seemed to shed from it. It was like squeezing the life out of some lively little animal, and then staring disappointedly at the dead body.

But the facts, hard and stripped of beauty, poured into his brain: They were the Iir. This platform was not a ship; it was a force field. It moved where they willed it to go. To be one with the life energy; that was the greatest joy of existence, reserved by Nature Herself for men. The nodal power of women was necessary to the establishment of the field, but man, the anodal power, was the only centre of the glorious energy.

The strength of the energy depended on the unity of purpose of every member of the ship; and as battle with another platform ship was imminent, it was vital that the Iir attain the greatest possible measure of union and purity of existence; for only thus would they be able to muster that extra reserve of energy necessary to victory.

He, D'Ormand, was the jarring factor. He had already rendered one woman temporarily useless as a nodal force. He must adjust—swiftly.

The wonder knife withdrew from his flesh, vanished into the nothingness from which it had been drawn; and the men withdrew like naked ghosts into the dimness.

D'Ormand made no attempt to follow their progress through the night. He felt exhausted, his brain battered by the cold-blooded violence of the action that had been taken against him.

He had no illusions. For a few minutes his staggered and overwhelmed mind had been so close to insanity that, even now, it was going to be touch and go. In all his life, he had never felt so depressed, which was a sure sign.

Thought came slowly to his staggered mind: Surely, the ability to live in space was a product of the most radical evolution over a tremendous period of time. And yet the Iir had adjusted him, who had never gone through that evolution. Strange.

It didn't matter. He was here in hell, and the logic of why it couldn't be had no utility. He must adjust mentally. Right now!

D'Ormand leaped to his feet.

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The action, outgrowth of strong determination, brought a sudden awareness of something he hadn't noticed before: gravity!

It was about one G, he estimated quickly. And it wasn't that there was anything unusual about it in a physical sense. Artificial gravity had been common even in his own day. It was simply that, though the Iir might not realize it, its very existence showed their earth origin. For why else should beings who lived in the darkest regions of space need anything like that? Why, when it came right down to it, did they need a ship?

D'Ormand allowed himself a grim smile at the evidence that human beings remained illogical after three million years, felt better for his brief humor—and put the paradox out of his mind.

HE headed straight for the spaceboat. It wasn't that there was any hope in him. It was just that, now that he was going to force every issue, explore every possibility, his spaceship could not be missed out.

But disappointment did come, a twisting tide of it. He tugged, and pulled determinedly, but the mechanism remained lifeless to his touch. He peered in, finally, at one of the portholes; and his brain banged inside his head, as he saw something that, in his previous more frantic surveys, he had missed because the instruments in question were edgewise to him. There was a glow; the power dials were shining in their faint fashion.

The power was on.

D'Ormand gripped the porthole so tightly that he had to force himself to relax before his mind could grasp at the tremendous thing that was here. The power was on. Somehow, in landing on the da k ship, perhaps in that last terrible will to escape, he had left the controls on. But then—a vast amazement struck D'Ormand—why hadn't the machine raged off? It must still have a terrific latent velocity.

It could only mean that the gravity of the platform must have absolutely no relation to his original conception. One G for him, yes. But for a resisting, powered machine it must provide anything necessary.

The Iir weren't responsible for keeping him out of his ship. For purest safety reasons, the airlocks of these small spaceboats wouldn't open while the power was on. They were built that way. As soon as the energy drained below a certain point, the door would again respond to simple manipulations.

All he had to do was to stay alive till it would again open, then use the fullest application of his emergency power to blast away from the platform. Surely,

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the platform wouldn't be able to hold him against the uttermost pressure of atomic drivers.

The hope was too great to let any doubt dissolve it. He had to believe that he could get away, and that in the meanwhile he would be able to find the young woman, placate her, and examine this anodal-universe energy business.

He must survive the battle.

TIME PASSED. He was a night-clothed figure in that world of darkness, wandering, searching for the young woman he had kissed, while above him the bright galaxy visibly changed its position.

Failure made him desperate. Twice, D'Ormand sank down beside groups composed of a man and several women. He waited beside them for a communication, or for the offer of another woman. But no information came. No woman so much as looked at him.

D'Ormand could only think of one explanation for their utter indifference: They must know he was now willing to conform. And that satisfied them.

Determined to be encouraged, D'Ormand returned to his lifeboat. He tugged tentatively at the mechanism of the airlock. When it did not react, he lay down on the hard deck, just as the platform swerved sharply.

There was no pain, but the jar must have been of enormous proportions. He was sliding, sliding along the deck, ten . . . twenty . . . a hundred feet. It was all very blurred and swift; and he was still lying there, gathering his startled mind into a coherent whole, when he saw the second ship.

The ship was a platform that looked about the same size as the one he was on. It filled the whole sky to his right. It was coming down at a slant; and that must be why the Iir ship had turned so violently—to meet its opponent on a more level basis.

D'Ormand's mind was throbbing like an engine, his nerves shaking. He thought: This was madness, nightmare. What was happening couldn't be real. Utterly excited, he half rose, the better to see the great spectacle.

Beneath him, the Iir-platform turned again. This time there was a faint shock. He was flung prostrate, but his hands broke his fall. Instantly, he was up again, staring in a fever of interest.

He saw that the huge platforms had been brought to a dead level, one with the other. They were pressed deck to deck. On the vast expanse of the second ship were men and women, naked, indistinguishable from

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the air; and the tactical purpose of the initial maneuvers was now, it seemed to D'Ormand, clear.

It was to be an old-fashioned, piratical, immeasurably bloody boarding party.

. . . Force himself, D'Ormand thought. Under no circumstances must he be a jarring factor in the great events that were about to burst upon the unoffending heavens.

Trembling with excitement, he sat down. The action was like a cue. Out of the night *the* young woman bore down upon him. She came at a run. She still had on the dark gown. It was a hindrance of which she seemed but dimly aware. She flung herself on the deck in front of him. Her eyes glowed like large ovals of amber, so bright they were with excitement and—D'Ormand felt a shock—dread.

The next instant his nerves tingled and quivered with the weight and intensity of the emotion-forms that projected from her: She was being given another chance, the startling message came. If he would use her successfully now to make himself an anodal centre, it would help to win the great victory; and she would not suffer exile. She had bedimmed the forces of purity by liking what he had done to her.

There was more. But it was at that point that D'Ormand's mind ceased translating. He sat amazed. It hadn't really struck him before, but he remembered suddenly the men had said he had already ruined one woman temporarily as a nodal centre.

With one kiss!

THE old, old relationship of man and woman had, then, not lost its potency. He had a sudden vision of himself racing around like a thief in the night stealing kisses from every woman he could find, thoroughly disorganizing the dark ship.

With convulsive mental effort, he forced the idea out of his head. Silly, stupid fool! he raved at himself. Even having thoughts like that when every element in his body should be concentrating on the supremely important task of co-operating with these people, and staying alive. He would make himself live up to their demands.

The young woman pushed at him violently. D'Ormand returned to reality. For an instant, he resisted. Then her purpose penetrated: Sit crossed-legged, hold her hands, and lose his mind . . .

Physically, D'Ormand complied. He watched her take up a kneeling position facing him. She took his hands finally in her own, and closed her eyes. She looked as if she were praying.

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EVERYWHERE, he saw, men and women were forming into groups where the man sat cross-legged and the women knelt. At first, because of the dimness, it was difficult to see exactly how two or more women and one man managed it. But almost immediately he saw such a group to his left. The four simply formed a small circle, a chain of linked hands.

D'Ormand's mind and gaze plunged off towards the second ship. There, too, men and women were sitting, holding hands.

The stars looked down in that hour, it seemed to D'Ormand's straining senses, on a sight they were never meant to see, the ultimate in prayerful preliminary to battle. With a bleak and terrible cynicism, he waited for the purifying sessions to end, waited for the glowing knives to flash out of empty space, and come alive in the eager hands that were probably even now itching for action.

Cynicism . . . the ultimately depressing fact that after thirty hundred thousand years . . . there was still war. War completely changed, but war!

It was at that black moment that he became an anodal centre. There was a stirring in his body, *something* pulsing. It was an electric shock, no agony of burning. It was a singing flame that grew in intensity. And grew. *And grew.* It became an exultation, and took on a kaleidoscope of physical forms.

Space grew visibly brighter. The galaxy flared towards him. Suns that had been blurred points in the immense sky billowed into monstrous size as his glance touched them, sinking back to point size as his gaze swept on.

Distance dissolved. All space grew small, yielding to the supernal ken that was his. A billion galaxies, quadrillion planets reeled their manifold secrets before his awful vision.

He saw nameless things before his colossal mind came back from that inconceivable plunge into infinity. Back at the dark ship at last, it saw, in its unlimited fashion, the purpose of the battle that was proceeding. It was a battle of minds, not bodies; and the victor would be that ship, whose members succeeded in using the power of both ships to merge themselves with the universal force.

Self-immolation was the high goal of each crew. To be one with the Great Cause, forever and ever to bathe one's spirit in the eternal energy, to—

To *what?*

The quaver of revulsion came from deep, deep inside D'Ormand. And the ecstasy ended. It was as swift as that. He had a quick, vivid comprehension that,

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in his wild horror of the destiny the Iir regarded victory, he had let go the girl's hands, broken the contact with the universal energy. And now he was sitting here in darkness.

D'ORMAND closed his eyes, and shook in every nerve, fighting the renewal of that hideous shock. What a diabolical, incredible fate, the most terrifying aspect of which was the narrowness of his escape.

Because the Iir *had* been winning. The destiny of the dissolution they craved was to be theirs . . . D'Ormand thought finally, wanly: That anodal stuff wasn't bad in itself. But he wasn't spiritually ready to merge with the great forces of darkness.

Darkness? His mind poised. For the first time he grew conscious of something that, in the intensity of his emotional relief, he hadn't previously noticed. He was no longer sitting on the deck of the Iir ship. There wasn't any deck.

And it was damned dark.

In a contortion of movement, D'Ormand twisted—and saw the second dark ship. It was high in the heavens, withdrawing into distance. It vanished even as he was looking at it.

Then the battle was over. But what?

Darkness! All around! And instantly certainty came of what was here: The Iir had won. They were now in their glory, ecstatic portions of the universal energy itself. With its creators gone, the platform had returned to a more elemental energy state, and become non-existent. But what about his spaceboat?

Panic poured in waves through D'Ormand. For a moment, he strove desperately to see in all directions at once, straining his vision against the enveloping night. In vain. Comprehension of what had happened came in the very midst of his search.

The spaceship must have departed the instant the platform-ship dissolved. With its enormous latent velocity, with power still on, the machine had shot away at ninety million miles a second.

He was alone in the vast night, floating in intergalactic space.

This was exile.

The first vaulting passion of his fears folded back, layer on layer, into his body. The accompanying thoughts ran their gamuts, and passed wearily to a storeroom of forgotten things somewhere in his brain.

There would be a lot of that, D'Ormand reflected grimly. What was left of his sane future would be an endless series of feelings and thoughts, each in its turn fading with the hours. Mind pictures would come of the young woman.

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D'Ormand's thought jumbled. He frowned in a frantic surmise, and jerked his head this way, that way. He saw the shape of her finally, faintly silhouetted against a remote hazy galaxy.

She was quite near, he estimated after a blank, frenzied movement, not more than twelve feet. They would gradually drift towards each other, and begin to spin in the manner of greater bodies, but the orbit would be exceedingly close.

It would be close enough for instance for them to establish a nodal-anodal circuit. With that Olympian, all-embracing power, he would locate his spaceship, flash towards and into it, instantaneously.

Thus did night and aloneness end.

INSIDE the spaceboat, D'Ormand busied himself with plotting his position. He was acutely aware of the young woman hovering around him, but the work demanded all his attention. First, he must locate by patient hit and miss methods the new galactic latitude and longitude of the great beacon of the skies, Antares. From that it would be simple to find the 3,000,000 A. D. position of glorious Mira.

Mira wasn't there.

D'Ormand flexed his fingers in puzzlement, then he shrugged. Betelgeuse would do just as well.

But Betelgeuse didn't. There was a big red star of its dimensions more than 103 lights years short of where the super-giant should have been. But that was ridiculous. Such a thing would require a reversal of his figures.

D'Ormand began to tremble. With wavering pen, he plotted the position of Sol according to the devastating possibility that had just smashed at him.

He had not gone into the future at all, but into the past. And the time machine must have wrenched itself badly out of alignment, for it had sent him to approximately 37,000 B. C.

D'Ormand's normal thought processes suffered a great pause. Men *then?*

With an effort, D'Ormand turned to the young woman. He seated himself cross-legged on the floor, and beckoned her to kneel and take his hands. One instant of anodal power would take the ship and its contents to earth, and prove everything.

He saw with sharp surprise that the girl was making no move towards him. Her eyes, gently brown in the suffused light, stared at him coolly.

She didn't seem to understand. D'Ormand climbed to his feet, walked over, pulled at her arm, and motioned her down to the floor.

She jerked away. D'Ormand gazed at her, shocked. Even as

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the realization penetrated that she had determined never again to be a nodal auxiliary, she came forward, put her arms around him, and kissed him.

D'Ormand flung her off. Then, astounded at his brutality, patted her arm. Very slowly, he returned to the control chair. He began to figure out orbits, the braking strengths of the nearest suns, and the quantity of power remaining for his drivers. It would take seven months, he reasoned, long enough to teach the girl the rudiments of speech . . .

Her first coherent word was her own version of his name. She called him Idorm, a distortion that rocked D'Ormand back on his mental heels. It decided him on the name he would give her.

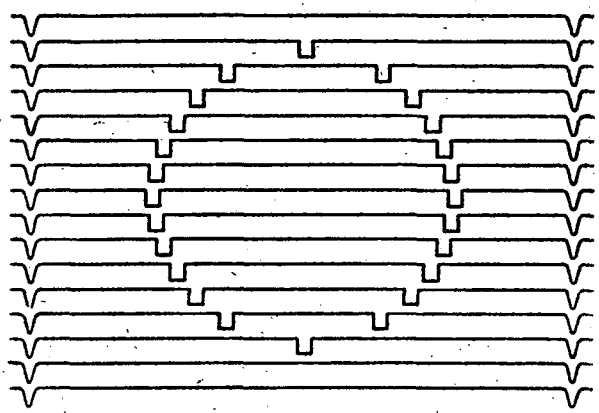
By the time they landed on a vast, virgin planet alive with green forests, the earnest sound of her halting voice had largely dispelled her alienness.

It was easier by then to think of her as Eve, the mother of all men.

THE END

EDITORIAL *(Continued from page 5)*

rearrange the "lines" so the square wave-forms (the "pi" sign) would stack themselves into the form of a circle, shown below:



Giving the galaxy the pi sign, says Morrison, would lead to the conclusion that the spikes indicated the scanning borders of a television screen. And we would then be off and running. First, a bit of Pythagoras, Aristotle, Galileo, Einstein. Later, when Ka P'nol got better at all this, maybe some Lawrence Welk, Huntley-Brinkley, Perry Mason, or—if it looked as if we were to be threatened by invasion—our ultimate weapon—Jack Paar. Let Ka P'nol beware! The earth-demon waits!

—N.L.

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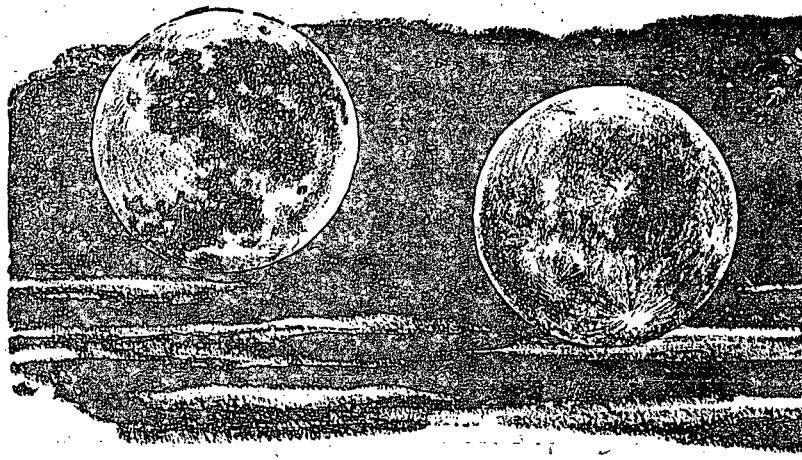

At 3:10 A.M. in mid-America, on July 1, 1997, the calendar stopped. The record of man's days on earth came simply and finally to an end . . .

* * *

At what would have been 3:10:01, the record of a new time, a new earth, a new man, began. His name:

MAGNANTHROPUS

By MANLY BANISTER

Illustrator FINLAY

(First of two parts)

CHAPTER 1

THE muscles of Jefferson Jarvis' thin, hawk-like face sagged with fatigue, accentuating the harsh lines furrowing from nostrils to the corners of bleak lips. Hunched at the wheel, he gripped it with hands like talons, his eyes glazed in a semi-hypnosis as the super highway unwound ahead of the atom car.

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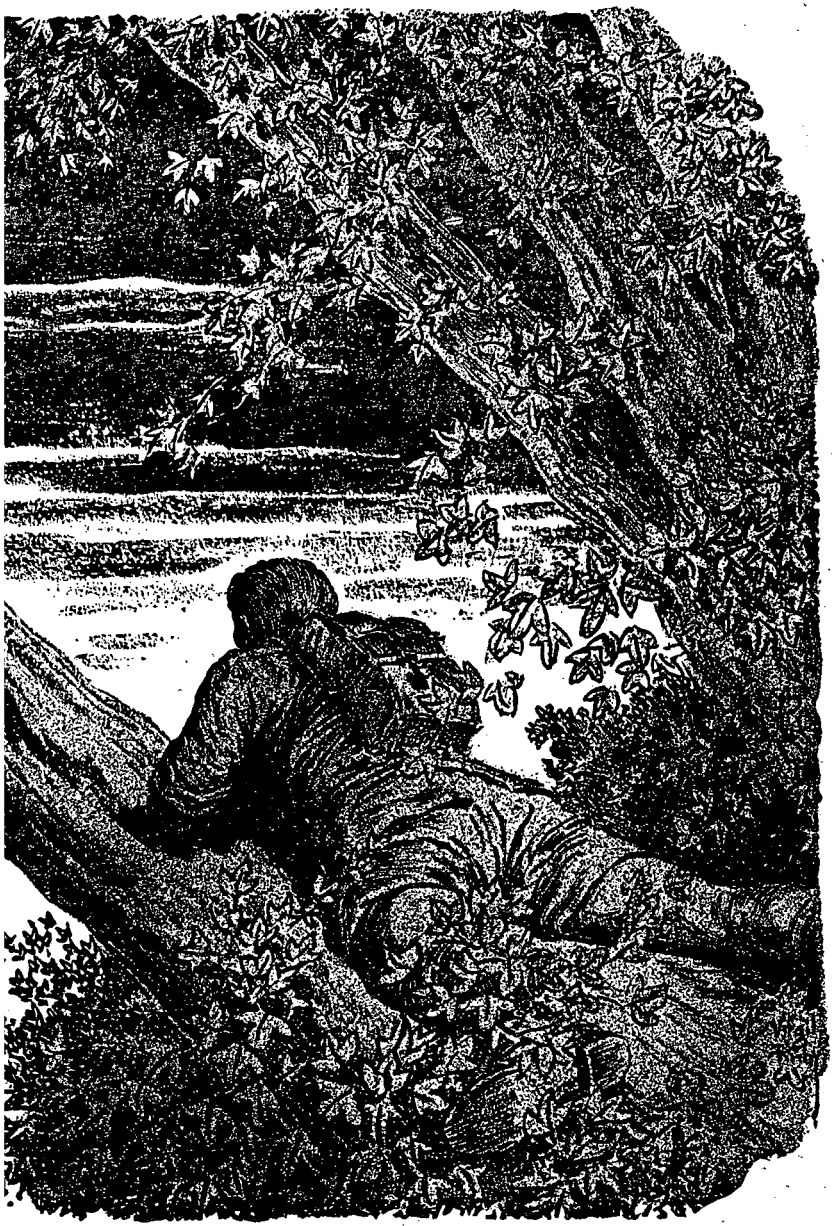

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He had been driving two days and a night with atomic engine at full flux. His body was taut with strain, and the heat beaded his forehead and jutting jawline with sweat.

But more than the heat brought sweat to his flesh . . . Eamus Brock! Where was Eamus Brock—would he be able to find him? Did it matter, whether he did or did not?

Eamus Brock's identity was not the puzzle to Jarvis that his whereabouts was. Brock was listed in all the appropriate source books, from the Encyclopaedia Britannica to Dun & Bradstreet. But the picture of a man's civic and financial standing is not a picture of the man himself, and there was a familiarity about the name of Eamus Brock that did not seem to Jarvis a part of his externally acquired experience.

Brock had written him a letter, offering him a job. How long ago? He couldn't remember, and he had thrown the letter away. And now he was frantic to find Eamus Brock and take that job. Why? That was a question he could not answer. He only knew that a kind of frenzy burned inside him, a madness that would not be at peace unless he found Eamus Brock.

"At the present time, I am not at liberty to explain," Brock had written. "But I need you, and I am sure you need what I am offering you. Others are with me in carrying out my plans. Write. I will furnish expenses."

Jarvis hadn't written. And now, the desire to find Eamus Brock was like a thirst in his soul, and he could not say why.

JARVIS stopped for the night at a dingy hotel in a small, midwestern town. The muggy darkness was split and reddened with a faint, far-off thunderstorm as he dropped into sleep. And then, abruptly, the sound crescendoed and the thunder that shook him awake was as if the very stones had tongues and screamed, and screaming, shattered. The world rocked and the wind shrieked across the empty air-spaces, and pandemonium dwelt in ecstasy upon the land.

The first lurch of the hotel flung Jarvis out of bed, against the wall, where he lay, snatched from sleep, but stunned and bruised. Bricks burst from the face of the building in a fusillade of sound. A hot gale shrilled through rooms open suddenly to the foetid night, and the steel skeleton of the building writhed on its foundations.

The plaster ceiling dropped, hammering Jarvis to the suddenly tilted floor. He lurched across the room, grasped the windowsill, and pulled himself up against the shuddering force of earthquake. The glass was shat-

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tered, but no breath of air came through the window. In the dark, he felt leaves and twigs there, and groping, contacted a limb thrust into his room. The quake, he thought, had toppled a tree against the building. A dank, hothouse odor breathed into the room.

Blackness was like cotton pressed against his eyeballs. His fingers ached from gripping the windowsill to keep from falling back into the room. He shivered with a chill in spite of the humid warmth.

Then the detonations of thunder diminished, grumbled into distance and sporadic bursts of clatter. The world had gone through bombardment and had died. The quiet was the quiet of the grave.

He let himself slide down the tilted floor, dug his clothes out of the welter of smashed furniture and dressed, waiting for the light, waiting for sound—waiting for anything at all to assure him he had not also died with the rest of the world.

GRAY day filtered through the greenery-choked window at last. Jarvis' clothing was drenched with nervous sweat as he grasped the limb and pulled himself along it toward the light. The limb swelled in girth, connected to a trunk. It was only barely light, but he sensed the massiveness of the tree in which he crouched perhaps thirty feet off the ground.

Daybreak was not altogether quiet. Occasionally, the earth tremored and an explosion, near or far, detonated on the air.

He clung to his perch, reviewing an ill spent life and wondering if it was worthwhile to hope for the best. His mouth held a stale taste—the taste of fear, which he had learned well during the year he spent in the House of Correction when he was fifteen years old. He had revolted then, and they had put him through the "treatment". A few decades earlier, it had been called brainwashing, but in Jarvis' day, the world had lost in crudeness of expression what it had gained in the refinement of fear.

Even at fifteen, he had not been a conformist. He still was not, but now he knew better than to let it become apparent. They had taken him and had broken him—turned him outwardly into a model citizen of the State. But inwardly, the turmoil of revolt still frothed in his veins.

A boy under twenty and a man over forty-five had one thing in common—neither was allowed to work. Automation, of course, made it unnecessary for them to work, and the class between the two ages had little to do other than punch buttons. The govern-

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ment gave you a living whether or not you could, or would earn it—so who cared to work? Only a recalcitrant few—and at fifteen, Jarvis had lied about his age (successfully, owing to the curiously gnome-like, old-man look of his wizened features) and had taken a job.

For that, when discovered, he had been sentenced to the House of Correction—a bitter year that would remain forever in his memory.

He thought of Eamus Brock and felt a twinge of disgust with himself for having thrown away Brock's letter. There had been an address on it, but no trick of memory stimulation would bring it back to him. For that he had to thank the House of Correction and its "treatment".

Why had he rebelled—and failed—in a world of conformism? Struggling over the years with this question had etched bitter lines in his face—deeper and more rugged from realization of the terror behind the benevolence of government, and the Credo of State: "The people must not think!"

From somewhere came the sound of water geysering from a ruptured main, and the light grew stronger little by little. The ground was dimly visible below, littered with broken fragments of a shattered world. The furrowed bark of the tree, hard as a sheath of metal, offered an easy descent. He felt heavy, sluggish, terribly fatigued, as he climbed down.

On the ground, no more was visible than had been from above. He moved cautiously, crouched, stealthy, ridden by a feeling of imminent peril he could not displace. There was a forest of trees all around him—trees that certainly had not been there last night when he had driven into town and registered at the hotel.

Trees sprang up from cracks and fissures in the shattered pavement, grew up through riven buildings, and arched and interlaced their leafy branches into an impenetrable screen overhead. He moved at random among house-size trunks whose tops towered a dizzying, unknown distance into the invisible sky.

THERE were dead among the ruins, many of them, but no sign of anyone living. The air was hot, choking, sickening with the fetor of decaying vegetation and of bodies already beginning to rot in the cauldron of steaming air.

The air screamed in front of him, and a shattering explosion knocked him on his back. He blinked dust from smarting eyes and crawled painfully to his feet. Another tree stood where none had been a moment before, dull

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green leaves still trembling—with the vigor of instantaneous growth? Where *had* that tree come from?

He ran, thinking of nothing but escape from danger, fell bruised, shaken and sobbing into a fathom-deep fissure, and lay there, wedged, spent, broken with misery and fear of the unknown.

Later, he pulled himself painfully out of the crack in the ground, emotionally calm, better able to survey his situation and judge its outcome. This was terrible reality, not a dream. He picked his way among rubble littering the forest floor and smelled the smoke of burning houses.

He heard a whimper and stopped, probing the air for further sound. Then he saw the boy—a pajama-clad figure sobbing face down on the remains of a lawn, beside a tree-riven house. Jarvis' eyes raked the wreckage, noted furniture and shapeless rags wedged among the branches, started with horror at the thing in a bloody nightgown that dangled in midair, transfixed by a six-inch branch. His face livid, he dropped to one knee beside the boy.

"Are you hurt, fella?"

The boy only cried. He coaxed words out of him—only sounds at first, then words, one at a time, broken. The boy had lived in this tragic wreckage when it had been whole. His name was Toby Carter, and something Jarvis knew, he was the only one left alive out of a family of five.

Tenderly, Jarvis lifted the boy, carried him to a clearing, and left him there while he went back to search the wreckage for clothes. Dressed and walking at Jarvis' side, the boy was dry-eyed, but his head drooped and the thoughts of sadness trooping through his brain were mirrored in his round, little-boy features.

"I'm your folks now, Toby," Jarvis consoled him. "At least, until we find somebody who can do a better job than I. You see, I've got no folks, either, Toby, so you will have to be mine. I've been alone in the world a lot of years, and I can tell you it's something you get used to."

"Why did it happen, Jeff?" Toby put in suddenly.

"What?" Jarvis knew 'what'. The sound was only a defense against the numbness that question brought shocking against his heart.

"The trees, Jeff. Where did they come from and why? Why are all the people dead? Who did this, Jeff, and why?"

Jarvis groaned silently. "If I knew that, Toby, I'd know a lot of other things, too, which I don't know at all. Let's not ask questions for now. We've just got to accept that the trees are here and

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suppose that they got here naturally and honestly. Just *how* we'll probably find out later. Does that satisfy you?"

CHAPTER 2

THE highway edging the town was ripped and torn by the forest, littered with smashed automobiles and broken people—people who lived. They dragged themselves with a peculiar heavy-footedness in a straggling line of refugees, burdened with belongings.

They had not been prepared for this, Jarvis thought, watching. They had learned to spool tapes and push buttons, but they had not learned to think. And now they were incapable of know ing what to do beyond following the one in front, going anywhere, going nowhere, just going.

Jarvis appealed to a highway patrol officer, standing impassively by his wrecked patrol car.

He said, "Officer—what's happened?" Then he felt silly for having voiced the question. He cleared his throat. "I found a homeless kid . . ."

The officer looked down at Toby, up at Jarvis. He shook his head.

"I can't do anything for you. I don't know any more than you do. My radio is dead. You better go south with the others."

Jarvis turned away, tugging Toby's hand. There was a scuffle in the trickle of humanity and he paused. Three men had seized the arms of a young girl and were forcing her to go with them, away from the others, into the trees. She was pretty, well formed, but now her face held the stamp of terror and her slim body arched away from the men with the tautness of a steel spring. They were laughing and pulling, not pleasantly, and one of them prodded her.

Jarvis turned to the policeman. "You're a cop." Bitterly. "You going to let them do that?"

The policeman shrugged, then squared his shoulders. He sneered at Jarvis.

"A man don't have to be a cop to resent something like that—just a man!"

He shouted at the men and moved toward them. One of the men released his hold on the girl and grinned at the cop. He laughed jeeringly.

"Go on, dude! That badge don't mean nothing now!"

The policeman's hand went to the pistol at his waist, but the thug moved more swiftly. A needle automatic nosed out of his pocket and pinged sharply. The officer spun half around, his left arm flailing the air. He tugged at the butt of his pistol as he fell, and the needler pinged again.

Jarvis grabbed Toby into his

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arms and plunged backward into the underbrush. He hadn't the stomach to travel with a mob like that, and he could not turn Toby over to one of these dispirited folk for probable desertion.

"He killed that policeman, didn't he?" Toby said.

Jarvis did not want to discuss it. He said, "I'll bet you haven't had any breakfast, have you? Neither have I, and we better find some pretty quick."

The sound of the mob moving along the ruined highway was a continuous murmur behind them. The underbrush hid them, but he felt exposed on the ground. The forest ceiling was an almost impenetrable barrier against the light and they stood in dimness. Many of the branches overhead were ten feet and more thick, butted to trunks having the girth of a gas storage tank, and he could only guess at the immensity of their height.

He went on, "If we climb a tree and walk along the limbs, we'll be safer than here on the ground. Think you could do that without falling off?"

"If you can, I can, Jeff." There was quiet assurance in the boy's tone.

"Good boy!" Jarvis patted his shoulder and squeezed.

THE airy level at which they trod was as solid as a highway. The branches were so thoroughly interwoven, they could make speedy progress from tree to tree and never once have to descend. Jarvis led Toby briskly along the limbs toward the center of town. Once there, he found a suitable crotch and peered groundward, nervously alert for movement. There was nothing but litter, rubble, and sprawled bodies. From nearby came the sound of water, geysering from the main, which he had heard earlier. The sound helped him orient himself.

He said, "You stay here until I get back and keep out of sight. Don't let anybody see you. You understand me?"

"Sure," Toby replied. "I'll hide among the leaves, like me and Eamus Brock used to when we played."

Jarvis teetered on the branch. He half expected the boy to be looking at him with a mocking expression, but Toby was serious.

"Eamus Brock? Who's that?" he asked tonelessly.

"A kid I used to know . . . I think. I . . . I don't remember him so well. It seems like an awful long time ago. We used to walk in the fields and the woods and talk . . ."

"What did you talk about?"

"I don't remember, Jeff. Just talk."

"A kid, huh?"

"Yeah—well, maybe he wasn't

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exactly a kid . . . you know . . ." Toby's face was solemn and serious for a ten-year-old. "Gee, I just don't remember!"

"Okay," Jarvis grunted. "I'm leaving now, and you do as I say."

He worked his way along the limbs to the next street and climbed down. Store fronts leaned drunkenly, show windows shattered, mostly masses of rubble. He heard a sound of crashing glass, followed by coarse laughter. The sound came from a ruined liquor store. He and Toby had not been the first to return.

He took to the trees again, came down later by a clothing store he recalled. Inside, he changed from his cheap suit to khaki pants and shirt, found socks and heavy-soled tennis shoes. He gathered clothing for Toby and moved on to a sporting goods store next door, which yielded a .30 calibre rifle, ammunition, sheath knife, canteen, blankets, pack, and other sundries he felt that he and the boy would need to assure survival. He rolled the blankets in a tarpaulin and strapped them to the pack.

He felt heavy and fatigued. Climbing among the enormous branches had tired him unusually. He stumbled down the uneven street and found a supermarket around the corner, one he remembered from last night. He heard the scuffing of feet and took again to the trees, watching anxiously, hoping the approaching group would pass the supermarket by.

They were men and women and a few children, perhaps a dozen all told. Several of the men carried rifles, and one had a pistol strapped to his waist. They have come to know the need for weapons, Jarvis thought.

He regarded the children and thought of Toby. Toby would do well with a group like this. But there was no place here for him. Men and women were matched in numbers. He would be an extra, an object of suspicion. There would only be trouble. Too, there would be groups of men only roaming the forest. There were bound to be clashes, sooner or later, between the men groups and the mixed, over possession of the women. Jarvis wanted no part of that.

WHEN the street was clear again, he climbed down and entered the shattered supermarket. He opened a can of corned beef, found bread, took a carton of warm milk from the defunct dairy case, and ate his first meal of the day.

Thereafter, he filled his pack, selecting carefully, picking among tumbled shelves and heaped cans that surrounded the base of the enormous tree grow-

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ing in the middle of the sales floor.

He had finished and was buckling his pack when a noise made him duck out of sight behind the tree. A youth, a crouching silhouette against the dim outdoors light, came in at the front. Jarvis' sharp ears picked up sounds of other feet outside, and he could tell by the youth's actions that he was desirous of avoiding the owners of those feet. The slim figure half ran, as noiselessly as possible, toward concealment behind Jarvis' tree and they came face to face.

"Don't be afraid—" Jarvis began, and stopped.

The youth was a girl, perhaps twenty-five, her ashen hair cropped short in the prevailing feminine style. Even in the near-dark of the store, he caught the glint of green in her eyes.

She gasped, rigid, with one hand against the rough tree trunk. The noise out front was coming in—a crashing of heavy boots kicking among the cans, loud voices, coarse comments.

The girl crouched down suddenly, her head cocked to mark the progress of her pursuers, a wary eye on Jarvis. She was at bay, undecided what move to make next.

"Quick!" he breathed. "Up the tree! They'll never catch you up there!"

She glanced at him, cool, measuring him, but the set of suspicion did not leave her finely modeled features.

"With you, I suppose?"

"With me, or without me. Or would you rather wait here . . . for them?"

"I think they would kill you," she said coolly.

"But they wouldn't kill *you*," he said. "Not for a while."

A dull flush mantled the flesh over her cheek bones. She jerked erect, gave him another piercing look, then climbed rapidly upward, finding secure hand and footholds in the sheath of fissured bark.

Jarvis slung his pack over one shoulder and rifle over the other, then followed her. They climbed into the open, through the shattered roof, and paused momentarily on the lowermost branch. He glanced quickly around for an avenue of escape, found what he sought, and hustled the girl along with him until leaves screened them from view of the ground.

"MY name is Jeff Jarvis," he said. "You can trust me if you wish. If you don't—" He shrugged.

She looked back the way they had come, raking the leafy vault for signs of pursuit. She sat down quite suddenly and looked up at him, wilting, all the reserve gone out of her.

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"Thanks," she said humbly. "I was so scared, I didn't know what to do. I'd never have thought of climbing up here." She rubbed her hands over her face. "I'm in rotten shape. They must have chased me a mile. All I could do was run, then hide, then run again." She hesitated again. "My name is Jo—Josephine Crane. I'm grateful, even if I don't look it."

He said, "You don't have to be. For all you know, I'm as bad as they are."

"You aren't," she said, "or you wouldn't suggest it. Anyhow—" A hint of defiance blazed again in the green of her eyes. "—You're only one, and I can take care of myself with you."

"I'm sure you can," he agreed. "But I already have a partner waiting for me . . ."

Her glance met him, quickly. "A girl?"

"Boy."

"I wouldn't be sure of myself against two of you."

"The other one is ten years old. His name is Toby. He's waiting for me a few blocks over, in the crotch of a tree."

There was respect in her look. "Your son?"

"No. I found him. Something like I found you. His family is dead."

"Poor kid!" She shuddered.

"He'll be glad to see you," he said, almost hopefully.

Her look told him she was turning his tacit proposition over in her mind. It was as if he had said, "You can throw in with me, or go it alone, as you choose."

"I'd like to see him," she said quietly.

There was no more to it than that. He turned, cradling the rifle on his arms, and strode along the ten-foot-thick limb toward the spot where he had left Toby. He could hear the quick rustle of Jo's footsteps behind him.

Ten minutes later, he paused, his brow winkled with a worried frown.

"I left him in this crotch," he said crisply, and he's gone!"

"Are you sure it was this one?"

"Yes . . . no—let me look." He knelt on the limb and peered downward through leaves, picking out remembered landmarks. He straightened. "It was here." He darted his glance around, not daring to call out.

"Jeff! Jeff—is that you?"

He looked up quickly, gladness knifing into his heart. Toby's round, brown face peered down from a screen of leaves hiding the next uppermost crotch.

"Come on down," he said softly. "It's all right. This is Jo. She came back with me to meet you."

Toby's small form wriggled into sight, clambered down the trunk. He was glad, that was all Jarvis could tell himself. For

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some reason, he had been almost panic-striken at Toby's disappearance. But the boy had only followed his instructions and hidden himself when it seemed that discovery threatened. And now they were re-united . . . and they had Jo with them. In time, he knew, that would present a problem. He opened his pack and produced food for the others, and while they ate, he had time to think.

CHAPTER 3

THEY traveled westward, in search of Eamus Brock. Was there still an Eamus Brock? Had he foreseen this mysterious catastrophe, and had that been the reason behind the letter he had written to Jarvis? And what was the connection between Brock and little Toby Carter? The boy's thoughts on the subject were even more formless and vague than those with which Jarvis tormented himself.

As for Jo, he found out very quickly that Eamus Brock was no more than a seldom heard name to her. A man of Brock's financial background and contribution to science had to be heard of to a certain extent.

"Brock—the atom motor man," Jo had responded to his cautious questioning. "I've heard of him. Who hasn't? He developed the force-field shielding for small atomic engines—used in cars, boats, and aircraft. That's the one you mean, isn't it?"

Jarvis told her he assumed it was. He didn't mention the letter. For the time being, he could say nothing of his quest. He asked Jo about herself.

"I'm from Chicago," she said, "spending a few days down here for *Inside America*—the picture magazine, you know. I'm a photographer and reporter—I *was* covering the Fourth of July celebration at the county fair—taking a look-see into the beating heart of mid-America, you know. I flew down in a company ato-chopper. It's a wreck now. So is the airtel I was stopping at."

"We're going west, Toby and I," he had told her. "I may be crazy, but I have an idea that if there's any way out of this . . . this woods at all, it lies to westward." More than that he refrained from telling her. "Toby says there is a railroad a few miles west of here—"

"About twenty miles," Jo said. "I noticed it when I flew in—I came in around by way of Kansas City. Do you think the forest extends that far?"

He shrugged. "There is one sure way to find out. Feel up to the hike?"

She grimaced wryly. "I've nothing to lose. Let's go."

Toby had changed into the clothing Jarvis had procured for

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him, and the man shouldered the pack and rifle. They struck out toward the west, largely following Toby's guidance to the edge of town, treading an airy passageway along the limbs of the giant trees.

They continued all that day and the next. They covered more than twenty miles, and they found no railroad. Within a few hours of leaving town, Jarvis had known they would not find it. The going had been hard. Humid heat oppressed them with no hint of a breeze in the dim depths of the forest. They had to stop often for rest. Not more than three miles from town, the broken highway they had been following disappeared, was swallowed into the ground, which began to rise steadily, and their way led them farther and farther into strangeness and an unknown land.

A TERRIBLE suspicion grew on him and alternated with doubts of his own sanity, and he was overcome with the obvious uselessness of their mission, in spite of the fact that the urge still burned strong in him to press on westward, ever westward, in the hope of ultimately finding Eamus Brock. The answer lay in him—Jarvis was sure of it. Once they found Brock—if they did—all would be made clear.

And then, his suspicion became almost a frightful certainty when they dropped down to the ground to rest, and his attention was taken by the shards of rock now littering the forest floor, which had become almost precipitous. The rocks were bits of rotten granite, and the alluvial overburden of midwestern America had never contained such rocks as these—nor such a slope as they now climbed.

They should, of course, be traversing farmland, Jarvis told himself, even though overgrown with the instantaneous forest. But the humus was thick and spongey underfoot, and this was land as land had been since time began. They were no longer in the Midwest—no longer in America—good God! Were they no longer on the Earth at all?

The forest began to thin around them, and bits of honest sky, a startling blue, showed occasionally through the leaf screen, gilded with sunlight in its upper reaches. From the length of the day behind them and the angle of the sun's rays, Jarvis deduced it was nearly sundown. The girl and the boy were obviously leadenly fatigued. His own feet felt shod in iron shoes, and his load weighed him down to the point of exhaustion. He cast a glance around the silent, gloomy forest floor.

Here was as good a place to camp as any, he thought. Dark-

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ness was squeezing in and not many more minutes of daylight were left to them. He located a suitable crotch not too high off the ground and stretched the tarpaulin for a shelter. He remembered last night's rain that had caught them shelterless in the depths of the forest, and the booming of the great wind that had flailed among the treetops, but which had reached as far as the ground level only in sporadic gusts. If it should blow and rain like that tonight, it would be worse, as the trees were more open here.

They ate sparingly of their provisions and he ordered Jo and Toby into the crotch as the last light of day dwindled into gloom. He had rigged the shelter for them—he could find rest elsewhere.

He leaned his back against the base of the giant trunk and tried to compose his thoughts into some kind of order, without success. He felt hemmed in by the forest, stifled in its masses of greenery, unable to rationalize the bizarre events that had befallen him. If only he could climb up, up toward the stars—*there*, perhaps, might lie an answer of sorts.

HE stood, turned his face to the rugged trunk, and began to climb. He passed the crotch where Jo and Toby were collapsed under the stretched tarpaulin and continued upward, his eyes fixed on the faint gleam filtering down, not daring to look into the Stygian pit below him. He made his way by feel alone from branch to branch, driven, somehow, upward and ever upward toward the far, far crown of leaves that shimmered with a faint reflection of twilight against the purpling sky.

It was fully dark by the time he reached the top. The sky was milky toward the east with a semi-pearlescence of the haze that seemed everywhere to fill the sky, stifling the poker-thrusts of the stars, so that only the brightest gleamed dully through. Jarvis settled himself in the topmost crotch of the tree, straddling a relatively thin limb, his back pressed against the trunk. Up here, perhaps, he could think more clearly. He could examine the puzzle in the light of the moon that was rising, lighting the east. *There* was something—the moon—to connect him with the world he had known. He waited with a feeling of excitement—waited for that familiar luminary to show itself—waited for whatever message of hope or despair its appearance might bring.

As he rested there, relaxed, unbothered by the fact that the ground lay hundreds of feet beneath, his eyes fixed on the sky,

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he let his mind wander among the hot points of the visible stars, not daring to attempt identification of any, wondering, guessing, dreaming, . . .

Then he stiffened in his perch as the moon came out of its coccoon of haze. The hair prickled on the nape of his neck. Of all the unexplainable phenomena he had observed, this provided the least explanation, the least hope. Not one moon but *two* rode the night sky, in twin chariots of splendor, and the haze poured over their shining faces in a thin wrack that all but obscured the fine details—almost, but not enough to make him think he was seeing double.

One was the familiar moon of Earth, that was quite clear. Its face showed distinctly the mole called Mare Crisium as well as other well-known marks of selenographic topography. The face of the other moon, though indistinct, was patently different—enough that Jarvis *knew* it was different.

For endless minutes he took in the spectacle of celestial nonsense—a familiar moon and an alien moon riding the sky trail together, no more than a few degrees apart. As the night hours passed and the twin moons climbed into the sky, he first guessed, then was certain, that they not only traversed the same plane, but also turned slowly about each other, revolving on a point between them that was their mutual center of gravity.

It must have been midnight when he gave up his lunar watch and descended stiffly to find a place of rest. The twin moons cast a brilliant glow down the trunk. Settling himself in a crotch above his companions, he heard a scratching from below, and Jo's voice, calling softly.

"Jeff! Are you up there, Jeff?"

He groped for her hand, shining whitely in the double-moonlight, and pulled her up beside him.

"Jeff, Jeff!" she murmured. "I'm scared! What's going to become of us?"

"Everything will be all right. Maybe the world has been destroyed, but there are a few like us, surviving. The world can become peopled again."

"But what about *us*, Jeff?"

"We'll survive, too." He smiled grimly. Whenever they paused for rest, or stopped like this at night, he felt the ache of it inside him—the desperate urge to be up and moving, to be traveling westward—to Eamus Brock. "We'll survive, all right," he repeated, and pulled her around so that he could kiss her.

CHAPTER 4

IT WAS still in the forest, and Jarvis dozed, holding Jo

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pressed against him. Clouds began to stream across the faces of the twin moons, and the whine of wind rose higher and higher in pitch. His dreams were heavy, disturbed—he was Proconsul, the primitive ape; then he was Man and he met himself, the ape, face to face, and there was no bond between them, only hatred, rage and murder.

Then the wind struck in all the fury of the storm, and the rain lashed down, warm and sluicing. Purple lightning flared among angry-visaged clouds and the racket of thunder was a continuous peal, rising and falling in a many-voiced bellowing of crashing vapors.

There was no protection against the furious elements. Awakened, dazed, Jarvis clung to Jo and she to him while the screaming wind threatened momentarily to pluck them from their airy perch.

Abruptly, the wind died and the rain fell straight down in splashing torrents that dwindled slowly to trickles, then to a misty spatter. Throughout the forest a dropping began, a *tock, tock, tock* of water dripping. The storm clouds broke, and slanting bars of moonlight raked the forest crown, danced among particles of moisture floating in the air. Suddenly the clouds hustled away, the sky was a velvet black, spangled with brilliant stars, and far away, the voice of the thunder grumbled like distant cannonading, then faded into silence.

They were to get used to such nightly storms as they trekked through the forest. In time, the forest dwindled and vanished. They found themselves in a region of snow-capped peaks. They trod the crumbling flanks of mountains, at the edge of the eternal snows, and descended into gulfs and canyons that split the face of the planet to intolerable depths, and down whose intestinal twistings rushed dark streams, foam-streaked, plunging and dashing among black rocks.

There was game, too, now that they had left the forest behind—fleet, six-legged creatures with triple-jointed limbs—proof enough to Jarvis that they no longer walked the face of familiar Earth. But how transliterated here? And in all of this, what was he, and who was Eamus Brock, and what was the liaison between them that kept him struggling to effect their meeting?

Fish in the streams were footed and clawed—heavy of body, too heavy to float. They walked on the bottom but snapped at bait as eagerly as any fish—and when broiled in the coals of their campfire, tasted like fish.

They traveled in a land of plenty, and they saw no other

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human being, only game animals and, far away, darting in the blue depths of the sky, hordes of huge, glittering butterflies. Sometimes, while they rested and the butterflies darted above them, they heard a sound as of ethereal singing, and Jarvis was enchanted with the music that rained down from the sky. The scale of it rose and fell like a lilting cadenza, smiting through barriers of time and intelligence into the primal hearts that beat in their breasts.

They camped one night on a rocky flat, beside a rushing stream. Tomorrow would provide a problem in getting across, but tonight they must rest. He built their campfire behind a windbreak of boulders, and smiled at the happy sounds Jo and Toby made, calling back and forth to each other, as they gathered dry driftwood on the beach.

THEY were never so carefree in their lives, he thought. Why not? Man returned to the wild more easily than he had fought his way up from it.

Jarvis had never been a woman's man. Since the night he had kissed Jo in the tree, he had not made so overt a move again. It seemed to him that she preferred it that way, and so did he. Their relationship remained one of simple, trusting companionship. Between them, Toby was a bond of devotion, and they both poured their affection and protective energies into providing for him as if he were the embodiment of themselves.

They dined on broiled fish and berries gathered from nearby bushes, and after dinner, sat lazily by the fire as the shadows of night closed in, too replete for conversation. The night wind swooped down the gorge, chilled from association with the glaciers of the peaks, and the stars shone hard and bright in a sky of ebon black.

Jarvis was not sure how long the man had been standing there, at the edge of the firelight, when he first noticed him. The sight startled him. A man! He was a giant, clothed in dingy khaki, travel-worn and streaked with grime. His eyes shone brightly against his face that blended with the shadows behind him. Instinctively, Jarvis reached for his rifle.

"You don't need that, man." The stranger's voice was soft and low, carrying an accent of mellow friendliness. "I want only a bit of your fire, if you can spare me room."

Jarvis stood, ignoring his rifle. "We have food," he said. "Have you eaten?"

White teeth flashed in an appreciative smile and the stranger advanced to the fire and squatted on the sand. The firelight glinted

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red and bronze on the coal black skin of his face and hands.

"I wouldn't want to be any trouble," he murmured.

"No trouble at all," Jo averred. She got out the fish they had been saving for breakfast, wrapped it in fresh leaves, and scraped a hole for it in the glowing coals. Already broiled, the fish would take only a minute to heat through.

"I'm Daniels," offered the stranger. "Once I was a lawyer—" He spread both hands in a gesture of abandonment. "Now I've got a mission up north. Where are you folks heading?"

"My name is Jarvis," Jarvis replied. "This is my family. We're heading west."

Daniels nodded sagely, clucking his tongue.

"You're heading right, man. You've got John Daniels' word on that. There's salvation to westward. Me, I've got to go no'th. But I'll be getting around to westward by and by."

Jo scraped the coals away from the leaf-wrapped fish, scooped it up on a piece of bark, and opened the wrapping. The hot fish smoked in the firelight, and the lawyer's eyes lighted up.

"Man! That sure smells good! I'm sure obliged to you, ma'am!"

He took the bark platter and broke off morsels of fish between powerful fingers and popped them in his mouth, shaking his head and muttering compliments on Jo's campfire accomplishments.

Jarvis stirred uneasily. "What do you mean about getting around to westward later?" he wanted to know.

"There's others like us up north," Daniels said, irrelevantly. "I got to see them out of it for sure. But you'll get along by yourself, all right. You kind of got to, so there's no use frettin' about it. I'll see you out west, all right."

"Where—where out west?"

"Where? Why, where Eamus Brock is, that's where."

Jarvis started and sat bolt upright.

"What do you know about Eamus Brock?"

"Everything—nothing," Daniels murmured, licking the last of the fish from his fingers. "Mind if I lie down here and sleep a little? I got to get going real early . . ."

He lay back on the sand and closed his eyes.

Jarvis felt his jaw tighten. "Who is Eamus Brock? Where is he?"

The Negro muttered drowsily. "The greatest man ever lived, that's who Eamus Brock is. Where he is? Just follow your nose, man—your nose lead you right to him!"

A gentle snore terminated the sentence and Daniels slept, a

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slight smile relaxing his heavy lips. Frustrated, Jarvis got up and rounded the fire, intending to shake the giant into wakefulness, but Jo's hand on his arm stopped him.

"Let him sleep," she murmured. "The poor devil is worn out. You can ask him again in the morning."

CHAPTER 5

BUT the morning found John Daniels gone. He had grasped his meager hour of sleep and left without disturbing them.

The presence of the giant Negro in the wilderness had posed many questions for which Jarvis desired answers. But one thing Daniels had vouchsafed him, and that was hope. He was another human being in search of Eamus Brock, and that brought substantiality to the dream that persisted in haunting him—that Eamus Brock still wanted him, Jarvis, and further, wanted him to bring Toby into his presence.

How did this weird feeling of his and the meeting with Daniels connect up with the real Eamus Brock? Only time, he felt, could provide the answer, and only by moving on, continuing ever westward, could he hope to take full advantage of what time had to offer.

He broke camp in a pensive mood, shouldered his pack, hefted his rifle and looked around for his companions. Jo was smothering the last coals of the fire with handfuls of sand.

He said, a little sharper than he intended, "Where's Toby?"

"He was here a minute ago—"

At that moment, they heard the sound of Toby's laughter and the boy came running from behind a screen of boulders, clutching a furry, squirming creature in his arms.

"I've caught a baby elephant!" he cried, and put it down on the ground at their feet.

It was anything but an elephant, Jarvis saw, though it did faintly resemble one, having a sinuous trunk which it waved up at him in a friendly manner, belied by the grim appearance of two tiny, needle-sharp little tusks. Jarvis stepped back from the animal, watching it narrowly for signs of a vicious nature.

"That was a dangerous thing to do, Toby," he reproved.

"Aw, it's tame!" Toby objected. "With that long nose and little, beady eyes, he looks just like Mr. Murchison, who used to be our neighbor! That's the name I've given him. Isn't it a dandy? Here, Mr. Murchison!"

"We'll have to leave it," Jarvis said kindly. "Come along, now."

Toby looked disappointed, but followed obediently as Jarvis set out. A few moments later, the man looked back, and Mr. Mur-

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chison was bringing up the rear of their little column, waving his trunk amiably and pattering along on his six, nimble-jointed little legs.

Jarvis glanced up along the canyon walls, measuring the declivity with his eye, seeking some sign of a falling back of the rocky escarpment that would indicate a broadening and shallowing of the stream, where they might cross. A swarm of the bright-hued lepidoptera fluttering in the sunlight on flashing wings, their song trilling faintly down the canyon, attracted his attention.

If these were really butterflies, Jarvis thought, they must be larger than any of their species on Earth. He was quite convinced by now that they had been mysteriously transported to some alien world remote from Earth, yet somehow connected with it. He knew for fact that terrestrial butterflies were voiceless: whereas the song of these was not unlike the trill of bird-song, yet more as if emitted by a human throat. The song consisted of a sustained note, rising and falling, cascading, trilling, then swooping to new heights of melody. There was beat and measure in the cadence of it, and the fluttering creatures sang in unison, like an unearthly choir as they darted and swarmed high up.

The swarm paused in its drift, the individual members taking up a motion of circling flight, a swirling of the individuals in the mass, at the same time that their lilting melody rose to new and higher flights that cut with piercing sound into Jarvis' being in its wail of promised ecstasy.

Then it seemed to him that he understood the reason for this excited swarming and for the exalted tempo of their hymn. The butterflies were pairing off, each becoming a unit of flight, whirling and gyrating in a pulse of sound and color. The music of their song was suddenly shrill, exultant and final in its expression of ultimate delight.

TWO by two, the butterflies danced in mid-air, a mating dance in which male wooed female, telling in song and movement the passionate story of his love. Then, as Jarvis watched, one pair broke away from the others and came fluttering away down the canyon by themselves, toward the human watchers. They swung in gyrating arcs, passing each other at a hair's breadth, swooping, falling, closing in on each other, sustaining the suspense of their desire to mate. The rest of the creatures hovered in silent flight. Only the two who gyred and swooped continued the song in a bubbling ecstasy of

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love, pouring out their mutual longing in the most beautiful melody ever heard.

It had been some kind of contest, Jarvis thought, in which the mating pair had won and earned the privilege of continuing their nuptials alone. And then, only a brief distance away, the fluttering pair met and clung, and their song became a fiercely exultant paean, a hymn of triumph, as they tumbled through the air, careening wildly on the gusty currents in the canyon, oblivious in their joy to the danger that lay below.

Jarvis' breath stuck in his throat in sudden fear. These two were about to dash themselves into the ground, or be drowned in the rushing stream. But then they rose on planing wings, and again they fluttered and again they fell, and abandon told against them. They struck the flank of a house-size boulder, then tumbled down its face into a tragic, broken heap at its base.

A sudden, shrilling call lanced down from above. The horde of butterflies had abandoned the random character of their flight and was diving directly toward the feebly twitching pair by the rock. Even as Jarvis ditched his pack and began to run toward them, the swarm arrived first, swooped upon the male, ripped off his wings and tore him to pieces in a frenzy of blood lust. Then they began to gorge, bending and bucking above the mutilated carcass, gorgeous wings scintillating with the colors of the rainbow. It was a hideous commingling of beauty and horror.

Jarvis charged, shouting and brandishing his rifle as a few of the swarm were about to fall upon the second of the injured pair. They became aware of him then, and fluttered aloft on blazing wings, the swarm following, their song welling up, hideous now and cacophonic in a blast of devilish victory.

The one still fluttered feebly on the ground, and Jarvis bent over it, torn with pity. Its two-foot wingspread beat the air ineffectually, and he grasped its body in his hands, carefully so as not to harm it further, and turned to Toby running up behind him.

"Beat it!" he said gruffly. "Go back and tell Jo to get here, quick!"

He turned back to the fragile creature in his hands, his heart beating a curious rhythm, his eyes alight with the wonder of his discovery. This was no lepidoptera he held. It had no butterfly body at all. It was a winged, naked, miniature, female human being, scarcely twelve inches tall!

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CHAPTER 6

JO splinted the butterfly creature's broken leg with a calm proficiency admired by Jarvis. They had no salve for the bruises and abrasions; but Jo made substitute with a good washing with water from the stream. There was no remedy for the torn gauze of her wings—that would have to mend itself.

The exotic little face, drawn now with suffering, was a perfect replica of its human counterpart. It was fairy-like, with a certain elfin beauty, and blue-eyed, with long, sweeping lashes and arching brows, dainty nose and full, red lips. Her long hair gleamed like threads of hammered gold, from the midst of which stirred tiny antennae that furthered the fairy illusion.

Whatever the origin of this creature, Jarvis felt sure it did not stem from the Tertiary apes that had spewed Mankind into the stream of Time. Its origin was unearthly, as was its appearance and very being.

"We'll have to take her with us," said Jo, distressed. "I'll weave a little basket and carry her on my shoulders."

Jarvis shrugged. Betwen Toby and his Mr. Murchison and Jo and this winged creature, he was accumulating quite a following.

Later, he dropped his eyes to the creature cuddled in the tiny basket Jo had woven from stream-side rushes. *Was* the creature human? What *was* the quality of being human—intellect—soul—what?

Jo said, softly, "Might not our descendants look like this a billion years from now?"

Jarvis started. He had thought of anything but that. How ancient was this world? Or was it really their own world, as Jo had hinted, ages in advance of them? He shrugged irritably.

"I do not think it likely. If you're ready now, we'll be leaving."

The injured butterfly maid ate only berries that Jo gathered for her along the way. The meat Jarvis had carefully preserved by smoking over a campfire she disdained. Water Jo gave her from the tips of her fingers that had been dipped in the stream.

They came upon a ford and crossed over to the far bank and trudged up a slanting break in the canyon wall. Jo was carrying the basket in her arms.

"See her look at you, Jeff!" she exclaimed.

"I've noticed," he replied noncommittally.

"And how she looks!" Jo observed. "In a way that needs about four feet more of stature to back up!"

"Are you jealous?" he wanted to know, cognizant of the erotic glances the little minx in the

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basket darted at him from half-masked eyes. "Remember, she's an alien thing. The expressions familiar to us may mean something different to her species."

"*That* expression?" scoffed Jo, laughing. "Believe it if you will, but you can't fool a woman . . . meaning myself."

Jarvis submitted pleasantly to Jo's good-natured chaffing, though he thought she was stretching a point or two. The butterfly girl's look of avid carnality couldn't have real meaning, considering the discrepancy in size between them.

They made a dry camp that night in the cindery bed of what had once been the cone of a volcano. They drank sparingly from the canteen, husbanding the water against tomorrow's need. Jo used a few drops to rub down the butterfly girl, but Mr. Murchison used no water at all, contenting himself with munching the few dry tussocks of grass that grew among the cinders.

From his last observation post, Jarvis had made mental notes of the blasted plain over which they must travel to continue westward. It was heaped and dotted with boulders, torn and fissured, scarred with outcroppings of obsidian in slabs and sheets among the omnipresent lava.

THE second nightfall found them destitute of water, and the awful stretch ahead went on interminably.

"I saw blue hills in the distance today," Jarvis said, licking dry lips, feeling the cake of accumulated dust in his sprouting beard. "But we'll have to find water tomorrow to make it."

"We'll be out of food tomorrow, whether we find water or not," Jo pointed out without optimism. "There's no game among these rocks."

Her words blasted Jarvis' hope that she had not noticed.

"Tomorrow is another day," he said, and refused to pursue the subject further.

He was keenly conscious of Toby's presence, and the responsibility of the boy's welfare weighed heavily upon him.

They had found no water by midafternoon of the next day, though the glassy excoriations of the plain had given way to a dusty turf of brown, wiry grass. Occasional twisted bushes and stunted trees enhanced the bleakness of the broad, gentle slope whose descent they followed. They had crossed the ridge of the mountains at some unguessed altitude and were now descending the farther flank.

They came to what was in its season a stream bed, dry now, its bottom rock hard, its banks lined with dusty, gnarled skeletons of sparsely-leafed trees of an unknown species. Jarvis' heart beat

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a little faster. Somewhere downstream there might be a spring, not yet dry, which would provide the water they needed.

His mouth felt choked and dry, filled with the thick cake of his tongue. His skin itched and burned with heat and dryness. He suffered from thirst and knew that his companions did also, though no word of complaint was voiced.

They rested in the shade of bankside trees, where it was scarcely less hot than in the full glare of the blazing sun, which seemed to him bigger, brighter and hotter than he had ever seen the sun before.

There was a sudden, agonized wail from Toby. "Mr. Murchison is gone!"

Jarvis was not moved. His principal concern was to find water, and yet they had to have rest. Jo's sufferings, he knew, were transcended by her concern for him and Toby, and for the feebly gasping butterfly creature she carried in its basket.

Toby was obviously heartbroken, both by Mr. Murchison's flagrant abandonment of them and by the lack of interest on the part of the others.

Jarvis glanced up at the dropping sun through a screen of dull, dusty leaves. They had only a few hours of daylight left and in those few hours they must find water, if any existed in this barren waste. Otherwise, morning would find them . . . He shrugged the thought irritably aside.

"Why, he's all wet!" Toby's cry only half pierced Jarvis' jumble of thoughts. *"Jeff! Mr. Murchison is here and he's all wet!"*

Mr. Murchison was indeed all wet. Lovely moisture dripped from every hair's end of his short, brown fur, and a trail of muddy little footprints led off down the baking stream bed, drying quickly even as he looked at them.

Jarvis hoisted rifle and pack to his shoulders. "Come on!" he snapped tersely. "There's water this way!"

TEN minutes of panting progress brought them to the pool —a much larger pool than he had expected it to be. A thin trickle ran from the downstream end of it, to be absorbed within a few yards back into the thirsty soil of the stream bed. But it was water—fed by a constantly, if sluggishly, flowing spring.

The pool made all the difference in their outlook. They could drink, cook, and bathe again, and they did. Jarvis was pleased with himself, pleased with Mr. Murchison—especially with Mr. Murchison—and with the rest of his companions.

"A little game would make this

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an ideal camp for a few days," he said.

Jo was bathing the butterfly girl with water brought from the pool in a twisted leaf.

"The little creature has really taken to you, Jeff," she pointed out. "Her eyes follow you wherever you go."

Jeff grinned and poked a finger at the creature.

"Pick on somebody your own size, girl!"

"A living doll!" Jo breathed.

"She's really in love with you, Jeff," Toby put in. "She says you saved her life from the Eeima."

Jeff looked at the boy, then at Jo. "What's the kid talking about? Heat got him?"

"No, really, Jeff!" The boy came close and knelt by the basket. The butterfly creature smiled up at him and held up tiny arms and took hold of Toby's hand. "Her name is Eluola, and she says she's glad to be with us. She loves you very, very much, and she loves me and Jo, too; and it was she who made Mr. Murchison go look for water for us, because she knew where the water was, and Mr. Murchison was too stupid to find it by himself . . ."

"Say! Are you making that up, Toby?"

"Of course he isn't!" Jo put in quickly. "I think he's actually communicating with her, Jeff!"

"How did *she* know where the water was?" Jarvis asked disgustedly.

"She heard its song," Toby replied. "That's it—the song of the water. To her, water sings a song, and everything else has its song, too—"

The butterfly girl uttered a trilling note, relaxed and closed her eyes.

"She's tired and wants to sleep," Toby went on. "But don't worry. She has been over this country many times and will lead us in the right direction tomorrow."

All of this did not mitigate the fact that there still was no game, and now they were out of provisions. Water alone they had in plenty. But, if Toby's fantasy was indeed real, they could take up a few notches in their belts and hold out while the butterfly girl—Eluola was her name?—led them to safety.

CHAPTER 7

THROUGH Toby, Eluola explained that they could no longer proceed directly into the west, because the land turned into complete desert within a few miles. They were very high above the level of the sea, and the land slid downward for a very long way until it was swallowed at the edge of the ocean. There it was inhabited only by the Sea People, whom she characterized as

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being of a fearsome nature, and who trapped the Eeima with sticky nets in the treetops, treasuring their catch for food.

On the other hand, if they took her suggestion and let their path curve away to the southwest, they would soon come to grassy savannahs, where water, game, fruits and cereals were abundant.

They had only one canteen in which to carry water. Would it be enough to last them until they reached the grassland? There was no way to gather from Eluola's description of the way how many miles they would have to travel. It was much to Jarvis' surprise that it took them only until midafternoon next day to reach a broad, though shallow, river that flowed around the edge of the grassland. Sight of the river brought more gladness to their hearts than they had known in days, and Jarvis stood for minutes, admiring the twisting line of tall, slim trees lining its banks before leading his companions down to where they could hear the wind whispering among their leaves and feel in their nostrils the crisp, clean scent of water.

They camped on the other side of the river and Jarvis decided to remain here while they regained their strength. All of them had reached the point of exhaustion, and it would take many days of rest before they would be fit to continue their trek.

Nor were the days that followed idle ones. First it was necessary to build a shelter, but before that could be done adequately, he had to have an axe. Not far away, he found a bluff made of flint, and after repeated trials, succeeded in learning how to chip the material in the way of ancient man. Using a large boulder for an anvil, he struck his chosen piece with a pointed piece of flint, chipping off slivers, shaping it into the form of an ax. The finished product was not, perhaps, as fine an axe as Acheulian man had been accustomed to wield, but it was sharp and serviceable, firmly fixed to its handle with stretched and dried thongs of hide.

Indeed, the land abounded in game and the river was full of fish, and between periods of chipping at his axe, Jarvis hunted and fished, stocking their larder with a plentiful supply. Jo and Toby roamed the plain, gathering fruit and grain from ripening grass heads.

Thanks to Mr. Murchison and his little tusks developed for rooting, they discovered tubers growing under the soil, and these provided an excellent fare, whether roasted, boiled, fried, or pounded into a flour and made into thick pancakes.

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AMONG the animals Jarvis hunted on the savannah were deer-like creatures, six-legged and very fleet. Jarvis' carefully placed bullets brought them down, and he thought, if they could settle here permanently, he could trap the beasts and build a herd, select some of the more favored grasses and grow grain —But he knew the dream was an idle one. The call was still within him to hurry on westward. He had a rendezvous with destiny somewhere in the west, and destiny's name was Eamus Brock.

During the days they camped there, Eluola's hurts mended, and at last Jo took off the splint, delighting the butterfly maid, who immediately attempted to stand up, only to fall fluttering to the ground.

Picking herself up on fluttering wings, Eluola hopped on one leg, then took off and went careening away, flashing and dipping among the treetops, the glorious trill of her song floating down to them on the wind.

Jarvis' eyes followed her flitting progress.

"I wish I could talk to her myself—there are so many things I want to ask about this world that are hard to get across through Toby."

"You might ask Toby how he does it," Jo offered.

"You could if you wanted to," Toby asserted. "I don't know how you do it, but I just think of what I want to say and she hears me, and then I hear her answering, like a little voice in my head."

Summer was ending. Autumn would soon be on hand with withering grasses and shorter days. After that—winter. He could not guess how severe the weather might be at this altitude. And they must be at their rendezvous with Eamus Brock soon. He felt that throughout every fiber of his being with a kind of innate knowledge amounting to instinct.

Toby, erect, slim and tall, was years older in appearance than he had been when they had started their trek a few months ago. Something about the very atmosphere of this alien world seemed to have accelerated his development.

Jo said, "I used to draw the line at believing in things like telepathy, but Toby has provided sufficient proof that he *is* in telepathic communication with Eluola. If he can do it, Jeff, you possibly can too—even I, perhaps."

"Oh, no," said Toby ingenuously. "Not you, Jo. Jeff can, though."

"What makes you think that?" Jo asked a trifle waspishly.

"I don't think it at all, Jo, but Eluola says that is the way it is. You are a child, she says—a child before children. What do

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you suppose she means by that?"

"A child!" Jo sniffed. "Well, I like that!"

Jeff squeezed her shoulder. "Maybe you *are* a child—to her. Maybe we're all children. We know precious little about her, you know."

"At least *you* can try to communicate with her," Jo said practically. "Knowing my own place, I won't even try." She flounced off to attend to dinner cooking on the campfire.

JARVIS ranged his glance among the treetops, following the clear lilt of Eluola's song. Her wings were a blaze of color against the clear, deep blue of the sky. He felt a longing possess him, commingled of wonder and desire, and he remembered his boyhood when, upon a windy hilltop, he had watched the birds in flight among the clouds. It had seemed then to his boyish imagination that all he had to do was stretch his arms in the semblance of wings and he, too, could fly.

It was as clear to him now, that remembrance, as it had been the day he imagined it. At once, he was distant in time and space from this alien world, a boy again, alone on a hilltop, and there crept into his consciousness a sensation of what it must be like, up there among the treetops with Eluola, flashing bright gold, crimson, azure and bronze in the sun. And as he imagined, he imagined something further, that a tiny voice, filled with laughter and song, tinkled upon his inner ear. What he heard was as if he dreamed it, alien and far from his understanding, yet the imagined sound was utterly dear and close to his heart, as if it were pure love he listened to in distillation of that ecstatic emotion into vibrations and harmonies of thought.

The song he heard within him voiced promise of delight such as he had never known, and it set his skull to ringing with the cadence of a hymn of passion. He knew at once that it was Eluola who sang thus—not with the song of her throat but with the song of her being, which he had never before this had ears to hear. There was a sweetness and poignancy to this inner song, unheard but apprehended in the deepmost recesses of his mind. He felt tears sting his eyelids, and his breath stopped in his throat. He quivered throughout his being in the ecstasy of privilege, as he listened to that imperative song.

He found Jo, grinding grass seed into meal in the shade of a feathery-leaved tree.

"I heard her, Jo!" he said tensely. "I heard Eluola's song!"

Jo tilted her head, listening. "I can hear her, too."

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No, he thought miserably, she does not hear the *real* song. She hears only the noise made by the passage of air through Eluola's throat—none at all of her *soul-song* which beat in a harmony scarcely made for human ears.

The weeks of hard travel had changed Jo. Her reed-like build had passed through a stage of stringiness into lean and rangy grace. The smooth line of her throat was a taut curve, and the muscles of her calves, thighs and arms were hard, her skin sunned a deep bronze. She had developed into a tough woman of the wilderness, a wild thing at one with the wild.

Jarvis' own muscles had become hard, compact bundles of fiber filled to bursting with explosive energy. In whatever alien world they found themselves, this world had accepted them, made them over into its own likeness.

He reached out and touched her, gently, as if she were a sacred object. Feeling his fingers on her arm, she stopped grinding, looked up at him, and smiled. Something electric rippled through his muscles and he snatched back his hand. No, no, he told himself. Not now. Not in this place. There was too much to do, too far yet to go. And there was something new inside him, born of that brief insight into the song of Eluola's soul. He had some rationalizing to do to bring his distraught senses and thoughts together.

CHAPTER 8

IN spite of the lure of their camping place, they had to go on, marching southwestward under Eluola's guidance. And as they marched, Jarvis communed with the butterfly maid with the peculiar facility he had suddenly discovered he possessed—but only discovered when he had forgotten himself and become again as a child.

"This is the world of Eloraspon, which means World of Beauty," Eluola told him. "It is old—old as old. As you reasoned, it is not your world of Earth, which we of Eloraspon know very well. Sometimes Earth people have come here by accident and have died here, and sometimes they have accidentally returned, and we saw them no more. There are holes in the veil that separates Earth from Eloraspon, and we of our world can sense them, though it has been forbidden for many generations for any of us to pass through to Earth. We have tried to help the lone wanderers who came through from Earth by accident, but we could never speak to them as we can to you and Toby . . . and to Eamus Brock."

"You know Eamus Brock?"

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"Not I, myself. I know of him, as he is known among the Eeima. He is of the Mighty and comes and goes between Earth and Eloraspon as he pleases. So it has been told to me."

"Why are you forbidden to go through the holes to Earth?"

"Alas! The holes exist no more since the earthquakes came. Why this is, I cannot guess. But generations ago, the Eeima visited your world often. The Earth-people were afraid of them, and if they saw one, tried to kill him. Many were hurt thus and fled back to Eloraspon to die. It then became the law of Eloraspon that Earth was for Earthlings, and we must no more trespass."

Old tales of the fairies were not myths, then, Jarvis thought. He smiled grimly to himself as he reflected that they found themselves in fabled "fairyland".

Eluola's explanation offered a new avenue for speculation. Undoubtedly, Earth and Eloraspon somehow occupied similar positions in different "dimensions". The earthquakes—of Eloraspon-ian origin?—had caused the mid-western town in which he had stopped to "fall through" whatever it was that divided the one dimension from the other. But, since the earthquakes had caused the holes to close, it was impossible now to tell whether Earth still existed on the other side of that nameless veil. Still, there was hope within grasp. They yet might be able to find a way to return to Earth, and if it was at all possible, Eamus Brock would be the one to show them the way.

There were other things, too, on which Eluola shed a confused kind of light.

"We are all children of the Mighty," she said, "you in one way and I in another. Toby is a child of you and you the child of the Mighty; whereas the woman Jo is less than a child, for she is not yet a child, but a—" the thought was meaningless, a bright flash of light, "—before children. I mean, first there is Jo and the kind of which she is; then there is your kind, and the children of your kind, such as Toby. When he is such as you, he will be a child of the Mighty, as you, and you both may become of the Mighty yourselves, which Jo can never be."

The complex imagery of her thought resulted only in confusion for Jarvis, and he dashed speculation from his mind. Mostly, Eluola's thoughts came to him couched in a symbolism that flashed with the brilliance of a philosopher's wit, but unclear to his basic understanding.

Although the physical beauty of the butterfly maid was in itself an understandable thing, the sheer beauty of her subliminal self was another thing, for which Jarvis was scarcely prepared.

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Now, as he communed with Eluola, he felt a new kind of emotion that was like a devouring flame. As they walked along, and the wonder of her grew upon him, he became convinced that he loved her with a passion beyond dreaming. He, in *love* with this miniature creature? He had to admit that he was, and to yield to it. As he slogged along, feeling the whip of grass at his calves, hearing dimly from behind the heavy progress of his companions, he communed with her on this lofty plane of love, and his soul knew utter torment with the knowledge of the disparity in their size.

AT night, as he tossed on the hard ground trying to sleep, he struggled fitfully with himself, denying his passion at the same time that he let it devour him. The lust he had for Eluola's flesh tantalized him with the bigness of her presence in his mind and taunted him with the tininess of her physical body.

Day after eternal day of endless marching brought no noticeable change in the geography of their surroundings. The pampas unrolled steadily before them, and stretched away on either side as far as the eye could reach, criss-crossed with streams, alive with game, dotted with copses of slim, elegant trees, tall but bearing little relationship in size to the super giant trees of the lowlands.

They lived, literally, off the fat of the land. Springs and brooks were so frequent that Jarvis became accustomed to carrying an empty canteen. They strode through a paradise of plenty which, though seemingly endless, Eluola assured him did have an end.

Sometimes, in communing, Eluola flashed through the air, fluttering over Jarvis' head, and sometimes she came down and perched on his shoulder, the better to match his slow pace. And thus she sat one day, when abruptly her thoughts were shattered into a cascade of glittering shards, a piercing cry welled from her tiny throat, and she launched herself into the air. And as she beat her way upward, she began to sing, and the physical song, blending with the song of her soul, brought to his senses a comprehension of what was taking place. His heart turned leaden with the understanding, and he cast his glance upward. A mighty swarm of Eeima was sweeping over the horizon behind them, myriad upon myriad of the shining creatures, and the sky darkened with the mass of them as if banked with angry clouds thrust before a gale.

Straight as an arrow's flight, Eluola sped joyously to join the

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swarm, and sight of her dwindled to nothing in his eyes, and she merged with the wave of color and darkness that was the migration of the Eeima. The song of her throat and the song of her soul both merged with the mighty, thrumming melody of the horde, and they raced by overhead, flashing in the brilliance of the sun, taking her with them, taking his love with them, leaving him standing on the plain, naked in the soul, and alone.

Wave after wave, the Eeima came over the horizon behind and disappeared below the horizon ahead—butterflies of passage, soaring down from summer heights with the onset of winter, which had presaged its coming with a chill breath seeping down from the peaks into the canyons and gorges, riming rocks and trees, embrittling the shallows of quiet backwaters with a thin veneer of ice.

Then the last of them had gone, melted into the nothingness of distance, and Jarvis knew that he had to find his way on from here by himself.

THEY made camp soon thereafter, by a spring welling up in a grove. Jo set about preparing supper from the supplies they carried and Jarvis busied himself gathering enough wood for the evening fire, while Toby frolicked among the trees with Mr. Murchison.

The stream that wandered away from the spring made a burbling, frivolous song that shimmered on the quiet air, and Toby's shrill outcries sounded far away. The western sky was a dull red, with a band of sombre-hued cloud paralleling the horizon, maroon, deep violet and indigo.

The warm earth was soothing to his touch as he stooped to pick up faggots fallen from the trees. Leaves gleamed yellow-green and golden-edged where the sun's rays lanced through the grove, paralleling the face of the land. Shadows began to gather among the trees as one by one the sun's lancets winked into obscurity.

Jarvis carried his armload of wood to the fire. He stood, drinking in the pungent smell of smoke, the savor of meat broiling, the subtle perfume of the grassland. He was sad and lonely as he listened to the equally sad whisper of the breeze toying among the leaves of slim, tall trees. Little songs came from the grass beyond the bounds of the oasis, calls of the little people who dwelt there—he could not call them insects. They were fleshy little denizens of the grassland who sang or hummed faintly as they scurried among the roots. Like insects but not in-

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sects, these were the tiniest people of Eloraspon—Eloraspon, World of Beauty, which was not Earth. His heart tore within him.

Eluola had said that the Eeima were the People of Love—and he knew now that in Eluola he had found the very personification of Love. She was complete carnality, pure emotion enwinged, and he had let her charm snare him through the vulnerable port of his undeveloped mind.

He thought of Jo with a new tenderness filling his heart. He had neglected her. Only now was he aware how her attitude had lately been toward him. It was the fact that she had said nothing that had prevented him from seeing it to this moment. He had been too eager to thrust her out of his mind and consciousness and to receive the thing that Eluola was in ecstatic intimacy. Eluola was an elemental. It was all so clear now. He had dared to transgress on the emotional purlieues of an ancient people—and the fall had hurt him. He was not of Eluola's kind, but of Jo's . . . and the feeling that welled up in him he recognized for what it was, and he could have killed himself for the way he had treated her, knowing all along, as he did, that she loved him. . . .

Jo and Toby slept in the dying circle of firelight. Cautiously, Jarvis got up and paced his way out of the grove. He stood on the prairie, listening to the grasses whispering in the wind around his thighs. The splendor of the stars made a symbolic pattern in his eyes, a pattern etched in the eternal fires that blazed in the deeps of space, and he felt that, if he could only decipher the code, he could spell out the message in the sky which his soul longed to read. He lay down in the restless embrace of the grass. The soil of Eloraspon was firm and warm against his back. Overhead, the dreaming stars wove magic before his eyes in the incomprehensible glory of the firmament, and his mind was a darksome cavern where no thought wavered.

CHAPTER 9

THEY broke camp at dawn, bearing southwestward of the rising sun. Jarvis had not spoken to Jo of Eluola's desertion, nor had Jo mentioned the subject. There seemed a tacit agreement between them to remain silent on something that was painful to both, though for opposed reasons.

He said, "Eluola described what she called the Great Cliffs. I figure they lie about five days from here. We should be at the Lake of the Sky by nightfall, and rounding it will consume three days' march. Then we follow its

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drainage river to the Cliffs. Then we need only find a way down before striking out westward again."

Jo said, "The change of scenery will be welcome. Shall we get started?"

Her cold reserve was not lost on him.

"You would rather have stayed in our camp by the river, wouldn't you?" he asked.

She shrugged. "It doesn't matter now. I was almost happy there . . . I think. But there is still Brock. We have to go to him, and that is all there is to it."

Her mood puzzled him. She had never before questioned the necessity he expressed to rendezvous with Eamus Brock. Now he sensed an undercurrent of resentment, and recognized it for what it was. Guilt and remorse stabbed him.

"I haven't been the best company," he said lamely. "I'm sorry."

There was only the faintest tinge of green in her eyes. They appeared almost wholly gray.

"Please don't be, Jeff. You can't help it if you don't like me, and I know I've been a burden . . ."

"That isn't true!"

She looked back over her shoulder to assure herself that Toby followed out of earshot.

"You know it's true!" she said. "Perhaps you had a right to be distant—but not uncordial. Am I in the way, Jeff? Would you rather Toby and I left you to go on by yourself? You could travel faster, you know."

"Let's hear no more of that!" he commanded gruffly. "Look, I admit I've been treating you rotten. But whatever it was that made me do that is over now. Believe me! I've got hindsight on my side now, and I can see everything very clearly. Do you really want to know what is wrong with me?"

"If you can put it in words of one syllable."

"I can that—easily. Three words, Jo. Just three. I love you. What do you think of that? Three words that spell out all the misery and all the happiness a man's heart can hold. I love you! Well—why don't you say something? You could laugh, at least!"

He was distraught, overwhelmed with the emotion that gripped him. He hadn't planned to blurt out his love like that, in the naked light of day. He had dreamed last night, dreamed of stars and cool night winds and softly murmured words—and here he was, shouting at the woman he loved like a farmer chasing kids from an orchard.

And what was in her mind? He wished desperately that he could tell, but her face was blank,

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her eyes twin pools of green that slowly deepened, began to well with tears. Then her mouth quivered and she collapsed suddenly against him, throwing her arms around his neck and looking up into his face.

"Fool, fool, fool! Oh, not you, Jeff! Me—*me!* I've loved you like an idiot since the minute you chased me up that tree for my own safety—and then I got the impression you hated women—me in particular! How could I have been so wrong?"

"You—love me?" He had not entirely heard her breathless outpouring.

"Of course I love you! How could I help it? I *had* to love you, didn't I? For being the man you are—for being a pilot in the wilderness—for being . . ."

He seized her roughly in his arms and smothered her protestations with kisses. He had been the fool, not she. He had followed a will o' the wisp when the beacon he sought had been shining brightly for him.

After a minute, they both became aware that Toby was standing watching them, not curiously, but grinning, and somehow, it seemed to both of them, that he looked relieved.

IT was only much later that Jarvis came to an understanding of the Eeima and of Eluola in particular and confirmed the analysis he had already made of the situation that had existed. Eluola had been Love itself, not the object of love, and he had fallen victim to a case of twisted semantics.

But that was changed now. He knew where he stood. More than anything else, Eluola had been responsible for bringing about this avowal of faith between himself and Jo. She had brought to light the love that had been hidden in both of them, and to her he was grateful.

The avowal of love, however, brought no material change in their relationship. They laughed together and made play of the grim business of survival, but there was a new art and a new spirit in their living. His eyes often followed Jo about her tasks, appraising her fine, supple figure, measuring the intrinsic beauty of line inherent in the curve of her slim throat, in the deft angles the planes of her lean face made with each other; and in his thoughts he often, too, weighed her capacity for love, but he made no effort to test his theory for validity.

There was too much to do, too far yet to go. There was a time for love, and a place for it. After they had survived—then they could love. And he put the thought of physical contact from his mind.

The Great Cliffs surpassed

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even the mental image Jarvis had of them from Eluola's description. She had conveyed the concept of a great gulf, but he had deprecated the image in the measure of the butterfly maid's size.

The sheer escarpment of the Great Cliffs plunged away at their feet, opening an immense gulf in space that was blued and milky in its great depth. He could not guess how many thousands of feet below them rolled the roof of another great forest.

They stood upon a promontory of the grasslands, rolling savannahs at their back. Before them was nothing . . . space . . . emptiness . . . as far as the eye could reach into the dwindling distance . . . banked with clouds and wreathed with streamers of blue vapor. Just to look upon it made him giddy and faint.

Mile upon mile to northward, he saw the sea, a bluer blue in the vastness of blue. The forest was like a pelt spread upon a floor, and its breadth was split by a mighty river, miles in width, rolling lazy S-curves down from the tree-shrouded south.

Before them, across the gulf of empty space floored with forest, the land rose again in blue distance and heaped itself into mountains that were like clouds; and Jarvis' heart leaped in his breast. That was his goal. He knew it with an inner certainty that could not be gainsaid. How he knew, he could not tell, but the knowledge was inside him that there in that cloud-like mass of land he would find the answers to his questions, the solution to the riddle of Eloraspon—and Eamus Brock.

CHAPTER 10

THERE was something about the vertiginous, awe-compelling drop that challenged Jarvis as no other obstacle had. Miles to the southward, he knew, the Great Cliffs shrank to the level of the forest, but he would rather not go so far out of his way. Still, his hope to find an immediate way down was not to be gratified.

They marched many days southward along the brow of the declivity, crossing rivers that spurted into space in a rush of spray, often traveling miles upstream in order to do so.

At last they came to a gash in the face of the cliff, a split in the virgin rock that extended into the grasslands and was filled with broken rock almost to the lip of the precipice. Descent was not easy, but it was possible, and another day of clambering over rock and steering around boulders found them at the bottom, at the edge of the forest, where it lapped like a sea of

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green leaves against the towering flank of the Great Cliffs.

They might have struck out due westward, except that Jarvis did not relish travel again through the forest. He remembered the sea to northward, and its unencumbered beach, and he led the way there, along the foot of the bare talus.

Weird creatures lived in the interstices of the wall of rock, some armored with scales or chitin, others soft-bodied, many-legged and antennaed. The least repulsive of these, Jarvis slew for food, running after them over the bare rock, swinging his stone axe; for their store of bullets was now preciously few.

Where the rivers they had crossed above plunged over the crest of the precipice, they struggled below through an eternal rain, hugging the face of the cliff to avoid the morass where the ever-falling downpour thundered on the forest and gathered itself again into a stream rushing off to join the mighty river they had seen from above.

They had grown accustomed to the clean, fresh wind of the savannahs and the coolness of altitude. Now the forest breathed its rank breath upon them by night, and by day the lashing heat of the afternoon sun seemed to gather extra, savage strength as it beat down in unendurable

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reflection from the face of the cliff.

What a strange group of wanderers they had become, Jarvis thought. Their shoes and clothing had long since vanished, ripped and rotted away. They trekked in the hides of animals Jarvis had slain, and were shod with moccasins Jo made for them, sewing with sinew and needles of bone Jarvis had fashioned. She plaited hats for them from grass, and all three carried packs, pouches of hide they had chewed upon around evening campfires, and from which the hair had been rubbed with coarse stones. Nothing but the buckles remained of Jarvis' original pack. The frying pan and pot with which they had begun their journey were still with them, blackened and dented, but still serviceable.

THEY were scarecrows, all three of them. He saw his own skinniness mirrored in the compact stringiness of both Jo and Toby. But he had to admit that the ultra thinness of the woman he loved was not without a grace and beauty of its own. Her figure was straight as the fall of windless rain; the muscles rippled in smooth, flat bands under her bronzed, satiny skin. He thought of her as a poem in flesh, long-limbed, supple, flashing of foot and hand, her form pared of all but the essential strength required to forge the body ahead. Joe was more to him than a whiplash of a half-naked woman. She was a symbol of the indomitable spirit of Mankind, the epitome of all that had made Mankind great. She was the race-mother in person, toiling against adversity with a cheerful face, the febrile strength of her perfectly integrated muscles managed by a resourceful brain that opposed the most despicable efforts of the wilderness to reduce her to its level of savagery.

It was women like Jo, he thought, who in the Old Stone Age had followed their men on endless migration, as they roamed with that restlessness of spirit which from the beginning has characterized man and set him apart from the apes, and which has known no peace up to last days of man's conquest of Earth. As long as women like Jo lived to mother a new race, the best that there had been in Man was not dead and would not die.

Toby had developed amazingly, too. No longer a round-cheeked, chubby little boy, he was lean, strong and gracefully tall—almost as tall as Jarvis. Whatever it was in the air of Eloraspon that promoted this phenomenal growth of the young, it had made Toby develop from a ten-year-old in a few short months to a youth of sixteen.

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Mr. Murchison was no longer with them. The intolerable, humid heat of the forest had not been to his liking and he had left them after the first day, obviously returning to the highlands where the climate was more suited to his coat of thick fur.

Even the memory of Eluola had grown dim in Jarvis' mind. They had not seen any of the Eeima since the passing overhead of the swarming migration.

AT last, they basked in a cool wind that breathed in off the ocean, and the thunder of surf was like music in their ears. The Great Cliffs were now miles behind them, their crown wreathed in coils of mist in the blue heights. Jarvis regretted the need to leave that lovely park up there, but the drive in him would not let up. He must continue this journey to its inevitable end.

They bathed in the sea, the three of them together, their skin garments cast aside; the low-lying sun glinted many-colored in the brine dewing their bronzed skins. Jarvis scooped shellfish from the shallows, prying them off the rocks with the blade of his stone axe, and with the same implement cracking them open to get at the flesh inside. They were delicious, roasted in the coals of their beach fire.

Once again they had accustomed themselves to the nightly, lashing storms of the forest. After it was over and the others slept, Jarvis departed silently and wandered alone on the beach in the glow of twin moons and the light of a billion stars. The surf pounded with a hollow, booming roar, and the night wind skirled across the sand, swirling its particles with a sibilant wail that was like the thin music of a distant flute, muted below the consuming throb of the vast orchestration of the sea.

He turned at sound of a step behind him. A warmth clasped his heart and extended to his limbs as Jo padded softly up to him. The twin moons speared catchlights from her eyes, silvered the halo of her hair, which was long now, below the level of her shoulders, when it was not bound up with vines.

"Thinking, Jeff?"

"Thinking," he admitted. "But you should be resting. It's late."

"I can rest as well here as there. Better, maybe. Being with you is restful to me." She sat down on the sand, pulling him down beside her. She said, "I love you, Jeff. Whatever happens to us on this terrible journey, I want you to know that. And wherever I shall ever be, I shall always love you. I want to be with you wherever you are, sharing with you whatever you are doing."

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Jeff took her in his arms and was grateful for her presence there, her warm, strong body pressed against his. Her hair, stirred by the wind, caressed his cheek, and his heart leaped up with the love he held for her—strong, harsh, demanding from long repression. Emotion swept over him in a tumultuous tide, like the combers curled fiercely over the shore and claimed it, taking the land into the sea. And so they yielded, each to the other, and the union of their souls was made complete.

Jarvis was not sorry, for something within him said that their wait had been long enough. After today, this alien world would be alien no longer, but theirs to dwell in and master.

THE tremendous river they had first seen from the crown of the Great Cliffs was a barrier which, without the insensate drive that spurred Jarvis onward, might have turned them back. The mouth of the river was many miles across, a muddy gush spewing its stain into the bright blue wash of the ocean, and it seemed impassable.

They tramped ten miles upstream, threading a way through the forest along limbs high above the ground. There they camped and set to work building a raft. Jarvis swung his stone axe until his arms ached and the sweat poured from him, and his bones crackled like hollow cylinders of desiccated tissue. As the stone lost its edge in the day's work, he reshaped it by firelight, chipping and flaking its edge.

The raft grew slowly. It had to be built large enough to transport safely the three of them and their belongings. It had to be fitted with a mast and a sail and a sweep to steer it with. While Jarvis and Toby worked at the heavy carpentry, Jo gathered thin, broad reeds along the river's edge and wove them into a mat for a sail. When the sail was finished and spread in the sun to dry and shrink, she worked on the ropes and cordage they would need, experimenting with reeds and grasses, twisting and braiding them for strength. Again and again she made short lengths and tested them, only to have her work fall apart in her hands when she tugged upon it.

Undiscouraged, she roamed the upper reaches of the forest, clambering far up among the branches, whereto even the echoes of Jarvis' axe were loath to penetrate. There she found a species of vine exposing scarlet, broad-petalled blooms to the sun. The vine was long, thin and strong. When stripped of flowers and leaves, it could be braided into stout rope to support their mast and for hanging and controlling the sail.

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From shore, the river currents looked dangerous. Heavy with silt, it boiled constantly in its endless race to the sea.

At last the raft was launched. They made no ceremony of their departure. Jarvis loaded his companions aboard and stood waste deep in the water, pushing it out into the current. He had, he felt, taken the width of the river and the speed of the current both into consideration. Granted a decent wind, they should reach the other bank before the current carried them as far as the sea.

Close to the bank where the river was sheltered by the immense height of the forest, the wind came only in vagrant puffs. He ran up their sail and lashed it to a set that would catch what wind there was and manned the sweep. Slowly the unwielding craft moved farther from shore.

Moment by moment, as they cleared the shelter of the trees, the wind freshened. The sail slatted a few times against the mast, then bellied strongly, tugging at the primitive stays until they creaked. Wavelets began to lap at the foreward end, and a swirl boiled up astern.

The flood on whose bosom they rode was quiet, but the tremor of the deck, communicating itself through his bare feet to his knees, let Jarvis know the remorseless strength of the current. There was no backing out now. They could not possibly return against the wind.

Sometimes, as they rode, Jarvis caught glimpses of things that boiled up in the muddy flood, and his blood ran cold. Perhaps it was only a balefully gleaming eye he saw, or the tip of a snaky pseudopod, but it let him know the river had a population of its own, and that it was peopled with horror indescribable.

CHAPTER 11

THE spot Jarvis had selected for a landing stood just ahead; behind were miles of river width. Then the wind died.

Jarvis yelled, and his companions sprang to lend a hand at the sweep and scull the ungainly raft crosswise of the deadly current which here raced with the speed of a rip tide.

The beckoning point of land on which he had planned to make beach head swept past, and with sinking heart, Jarvis watched it dwindle in the vast reach of space behind. The raft tore on, riding the current, creaking and straining against the heave of the sea. They flung themselves flat and clung to the deck of poles as the raft bucked in the furious cauldron where the river and ocean came to grips. Giant waves tossed them high, tilted their

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craft, and dropped it shuddering in a welter of thundering waters. Straining every muscle to maintain his hold on the canted deck, Jarvis watched with agonized eyes as the rifle and their packs slid overboard. He had taken the stone axe out of his belt and laid it on the deck when pushing the raft out into the river, and now it, too, slithered to the edge, caught a moment, then fell to the bottom of the sea.

The raft came upright, askew in its members, but still whole. The mast still stood and the sail hung from its lashings. They rode a heavy ground swell while the current carried them ever farther out to sea.

They had lost the steering oar, and another had to be fabricated out of materials ripped from the deck—not so efficient as the lost sweep, but serviceable. By the time he had finished necessary repairs, the wind had again risen, but had backed around a few points more northerly, so that their progress across the current was not so effective as it might have been.

Jarvis' mind worked lightning calculations, figuring their chances of making the beach before nightfall. He knew that when night came and brought with it the customary nocturnal storm, the raft would never hold together. They were out of the grip of the river current now, but far out to sea. The land was only dimly visible as a smudge on the horizon.

He recollected the view he had first had of the river mouth, from the crown of the Great Cliffs. If memory served him, the beach on this side of the river made a sweeping, inward curve, betokening a back current set up in the ocean by the outpouring of river waters. That current should be carrying them parallel to shore now. If the wind stayed as it was, they should be able to make way toward the beach without hindrance.

He stood by the sweep, straining his eyes shoreward. The distant smudge of land was definitely more sharply defined now. He glanced toward the sun, which was about half past mid-day. With luck, they would make the beach in plenty of time before sunset.

WHEN they arrived at a point about a mile offshore, the wind shifted again, halfway around the compass, and began to blow directly against them. A low sun hovered among gathering stormclouds over ancient hills in the distance. Although the full force of the nocturnal storm would not strike before midnight, the wind was already rising, beating them inexorably out to sea.

"We're as close to shore as we

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are likely to get," Jarvis said, weighing the situation carefully before he spoke. "We can stay with the raft and try to ride out tonight's storm, or swim for shore now. Which shall we do?"

"I could swim it, all right," Toby said. "I'm strong!"

Jo frowned worriedly. "Would the raft hold together in the storm?"

He shrugged. "I wouldn't depend on it."

She laughed, nervously. "Swim it is, then! If anything happens—at least, it will be sooner!"

He nodded, not daring for a moment to speak, lest his voice betray the worry he tried to hide. What currents waited to drag them under—what monstrous denizens of the sea lurked between them and shore—well, those were things against which they had to take their chances.

He said, "I'll go first. After I'm out a hundred yards—you'll know it's safe by then—Toby can follow. After him—you."

Jo nodded hastily. He knew by the sudden darkening of her eyes that fear for him stabbed through her. She smiled, bravely.

"Lead on, McDuff!"

A hundred yards from the raft, Jarvis straightened and began treading water. The sea was not so salt, he thought, as the oceans of Earth, and it was comfortably warm. However, it seemed to have less buoyancy. He had to stroke harder and faster to keep his head out of water. The heaviness to which he had grown accustomed on land was a burdensome thing here, and he would have sunk like a plummet except for the months of hardship that had hardened his muscles to the strength and endurance of steel cords.

A moment later, it seemed, Jo and Toby joined him and they struck out together for the frothing line of breakers that marked the shore.

THE combers breaking among the rocks that fanged the beach made wild water far out from shore. Jarvis was blinded and buffeted, and he was not aware when he lost contact with his companions. The breakers foamed over him, came cascading down, beating him under, turning him end over end. He strangled on brine, and stroked his best, frantically, to avoid the jagged flanks of streaming rocks.

There was an undertow here that threatened to drag him under. He was gasping for breath and pains lanced through his arms and shoulders. He saw the rock through a blinding dash of spray—too late to avoid it. A wave lifted him high and slammed him down, as a wrestler slams his opponent on the mat. He twisted his body agilely at

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the last moment, then felt the jarring as his flesh contacted stone, the ripping and bruising, and then he was unconscious.

The nightly storm had come and gone when he came again to his senses. The stars were out, and Eloraspon's twin satellites rode high in the sky, once again near the full. Jarvis sat up, pulling his body painfully out of the rocky crevice into which it had been jammed. The tide was far out, and the roar of the surf sounded muted and distant.

He got up, staggering a little, wincing with the pain that seemed to throb all over him. But no bones were broken—of that he was sure and thankful. It was dark on the beach, in spite of moon- and star-light, and the chill sea wind nipped at his naked flesh.

Suddenly he thought of Jo, and after her, of Toby. He cried out, hoarsely. There was no answer and the dimness of the light was growing dimmer still as clouds hurried across the faces of the two moons.

Had they drowned, then, and he alone had been saved? He beat himself upon the temples with his knuckles. It was a miracle that he himself was alive. Where one miracle can occur, there can also occur two or three, he told himself grimly. Miracles come cheaper by the dozen. He would not let himself approach the thought that anything could have happened to either Jo or Toby. At the worst, he thought, they lay unconscious still on the beach. At the best, they were worriedly combing the beach and sand dunes for him, probably thinking much the same about him as he was thinking about them.

He called again, a few times, futilely. They would not be able to hear him if they were a hundred yards away. All he could do was wait for morning to bring enough light so that he could start searching.

WITH the first light of dawn, he searched among the rocks and found nobody. Shellfish he found, and these he wrenched from their rocky habitat, pounded open and ate raw. His belly cried out with hunger, and he could not afford to be fastidious. He had covered several miles of the beach by the time the sun came up. On his right was the sea, white maned, its incoming tide ever narrowing the strip of damp sand upon which he walked. At his left were dunes, their tops gilded in the morning sun. And beyond the dunes, towering over them, was the edge of the forest.

All his search for Jo and Toby had revealed no tracks in the sand, yet he stubbornly refused to believe that the sea had

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claimed them. He stood still and listened. The fresh morning air whipped around him, stirring the tatters of the skin clout he wore. What had stopped him? To what vagrant sound did he give ear? As he tried painfully to listen, he heard only the sibillant whisper of the wind over the sand, the quiet booming of the surf. There were no sea birds to flash wheeling and crying in the sun. There were no sea birds at all on Eloraspon.

But as soon as he started trudging on, he heard it again—or thought he heard it. And so he progressed—stumbling a few yards, then pausing to listen, then repeating. There was something ineffable about what he heard, something that caught the breath in his throat and filled his being with a kind of wonder. But it was fleeting—momentary—he could not grasp it at all.

The sun stood higher in the sky, beat upon his head and naked shoulders with the blistering percussion of red hot hammers. Sand and salt in his wounds stung like a horde of attacking ants. He breathed deeply, letting the air whistle out through his nostrils, head flung back—and then he heard it for sure. He grasped it, and it came in stronger, swelling throughout the breadth and depth of his soul with the magnificence of a mighty hymn, thousand-voiced.

This was a soul-song of living beings, but where that of Eluola and the Eeima had been a song of capricious passion, this was a nostalgic dirge of adoration, pregnant with awe and holiness, of a people prostrate before their god.

His legs twinkled in nimble flight over the ground, carrying him over the dunes, into the edge of the forest. He rounded great trunks at a run, leaped fallen limbs, staggered and flailed his way through underbrush; then he burst through a screen of leaves and found himself in a natural cathedral, arch-roofed, dim-lit, columned and aisled with trees. His sweeping glance took in a cluster of huts that must be the homes of the singers who worshipped so beautifully, and in the midst of the clearing were the singers themselves . . . and the object of their adoration . . .

The scene was like a painting from the mad brush of Ralph Rayburn Phillips—a weird caricature of a worshipping throng, low in color saturation, shadowy, gross and terrible!

(*Concluded next month*)

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The TREKKERS

By DANIEL F. GALOUYE
Illustrator BASSFORD

From the Shining Mountain came the secret that was to change the way of Man. A story of the Beginnings.

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SQUINTING against the glitter of the distant gray-white mountain, Ime crawled to the edge of the cliff and lay staring down on the camp below.

Hands drawn up beneath his chin, he squirmed against the stinging cold of the pebbles that bit into his chest. While down through the pass howled a wind raw with threat of the falling whiteness it would soon bring.

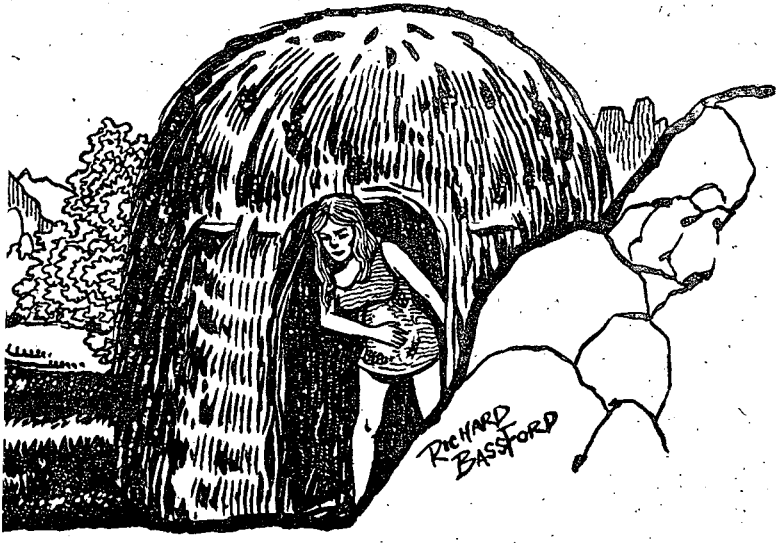
His intense eyes, crouching deep beneath coarse brow, avoided the waning fury of the Giver of Warmth and, instead, sought out the Trekkers, bunched around their lean-tos.

Myshe stepped from one of the shelters and, seeing her, his head reared up alertly to make certain Broken Teeth was not around. Satisfied that his mate was in no danger, he watched her move about among the others. Her light hair caught and cast back the soft brightness that came from the Giver above.

She walked with a weary pace that betrayed the heavy pain lurking in her swollen stomach. And he wondered if all the others were aware that soon there would be another Trekker among them—a small one, of course, who would have to be carried for a long while.

If Broken Teeth knew the secret, he had no respect for it. That much was clear. Otherwise, he would not be of a mind to seize Myshe for himself.

Tense with an eagerness to fight for what was his, Ime looked around again for the would-be mate stealer. But he



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must have already crawled into his lean-to.

Ime lay there breathing hard with disappointment. If he was going to kill Broken Teeth in order to keep the other's spear out of his own chest, he would have to find some way to get him off alone before the next awakening. For then, he was certain, was when the trek to the warmlands would begin.

SENSING the nearness of the trek—the eternal, exhausting trek—Ime wondered whether all those below knew that when the Upper Vastness was again flush with the Giver's light they would be on their way back to the distant land by the endless water.

Those who didn't would eventually learn to watch Old Up-Front Trekker for the signs. Even now he was down there bundling up his spears and shivering while he stole an occasional, worried glance at the pass and listened to the shriek of the wind.

Ime drew his arms in tightly against his body for the meager protection they offered against the cold. And he thought longingly of the warmth that would lie at the end of the leg-wearying journey.

Overhead, the Vastness grunted with the harsh sounds of, oh, so many creatures winging their way from the approaching whiteness—creatures which, by the time the Trekkers finally overtook them near the shoreless water, would be fat again for the snare.

But that was only one of the promises that made the march bearable, beckoning him warmward much like he was drawn to Myshe by the pleasantness of her face and body and by the delighted sounds of contentment she made when she threw her head back and let her teeth show.

Retreating along the ledge and over the pass, he headed through the sloping forest for the camp below.

Great trees, swaying in their endless struggle with the lower edge of the Vastness, protected him from the sting of the wind. But they also held back the Giver's heat, such that he was none the better off.

From somewhere ahead came a creaking and moaning that climbed again and again above the steady sound of swishing leaves. Only briefly wondering what was making the noise, he gave his thoughts over to the rigors of the long journey ahead.

Would there never be an end to the walking? He glanced down at the fingers on his hands. It had been not that many sleeps ago that the Trekkers had arrived here, following the movement of game coldward. And now that the wind was ready to

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hurl its whiteness and turn water to rock, it was time to head warmward once again.

Trek—rest—trek back the way they had come—rest again—then back in the other direction.

It was never ending. It was tiring. It left a Trekker no time for himself, no time for anything except snaring game, then moving on—always in chase of food or in flight before the oncoming fury of the cold.

Once Ime had gotten the idea of making a comfortable, large lean-to that would stand strong against the wind and falling drops. But if he built in the warmlands, the swelling waters would only sweep his shelter away while the Trekkers were coldward in pursuit of larger game. And if he built near the mountain of rock water, the wind and the whiteness would destroy it after they moved warmward again.

If there were only some way they could stay in one place! The things he might do!

Longingly, he recalled how he had once lagged behind in order to chisel a thought on stone. He would have carved many more beside it. But, as it was, he had to run long and hard to catch up with the other Trekkers.

He was beneath the creaking noise now and he shielded his eyes to look up against a shaft of Giverlight. After a while he saw the two branches that were scraping together to make the sound.

BACK and forth—creak, moan—wood against wood—swaying, lurching, rubbing.

There was something he couldn't quite remember about wood rubbing against wood, something that might have taken place many, many treks ago—perhaps only in a dream. He wasn't sure. He had been very small at the time—a Trekker who still had to be carried occasionally because his legs were short-striding and not hardened like those of the older ones.

The hunters (as he recalled the dream, if that's what it was) had left to attend to their snares and bring in whatever game they could by direct killing. And, with nearly all the she-hers gone to gather fruit from the valley, the camp was almost empty.

Ime waited his chance, keeping his eyes on Old Mateless Her who had been left behind. When she finally turned her back, he darted off between the other shelters and scrambled up the side of the hill as fast as his small legs could carry him.

In the woods by himself for the first time, he went forward more slowly, drawing back occasionally from the lurking shad-

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ows. And he wasn't too sure now that he actually wanted to be among the great trees without anyone to hold his hand and help him along.

But when he reached the clearing and stood once more in the brightness of the Giver, his fears went away. And for a long while he ran and jumped over the rocks and rolled through the patches of greenness until, tired, he lay still and let the warmth fall down on his face while he gazed into the Upper Vastness.

There was a large creature up there, he soon discovered—a wingless thing that stayed in one place but grew larger while he looked. And it was all a-glitter, like the gray-white mountain.

Ime watched—and slept. And when he opened his eyes again he lunged up, sensing that something was in the clearing with him—something huge, perhaps even more dangerous than the Swift Four-Legged Ones with the Great Teeth.

It was then that he suspected his experience couldn't be real. For he was unable to move. And it was only in dreams that his running feet failed to take him away from peril.

Out of the corner of his eye he then studied the new shining mountain that had come to rest not quite touching the ground in the center of the clearing. And he wondered whether it might be the same wingless thing he had only recently seen in the Upper Vastness.

Again, Ime futilely tried to run when he saw the creature coming from a hole in the side of the strange mountain. Itself sheening in the Giverlight, it looked something like a Trekker —only it was larger. Its head was round like a nut husk, gray-white and smooth like rock water.

It came and stood before him for a long while. Then it stooped and gathered handfuls of dry, crisp leaves, arranging them in a pile along with many twigs and branches. Selecting two sticks, it began spinning the end of one against the other, holding them half-buried among the leaves.

Ime was terrified and would have shouted out so that the whole forest could hear if his mouth had been able to move. But, as it was, he could only stand there and watch.

Suddenly part of the creature's face seemed to fall away and Ime could hear the hissing of its breath as it bent over and blew against the leaves.

A THIN, dark cloud began rising up out of the pile, as though it had been captured from the Upper Vastness and was trying to return there. And abruptly the leaves and twigs came alive with little bits of

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leaping redness that were like pieces of the Giver Himself!

The creature-thing made more wind with its mouth and Ime caught a glimpse of the almost Trekkerlike face-within-a-face that he could see through the opening in its head.

Making sharp, snapping noises now, the leaping redness squirmed about, consuming the rest of the twigs and starting to feed on the larger branches.

Ime's eyes remained on the crimson hunger and he watched it gorging itself while the Trekkerlike creature went back into the brilliant mountain. The hole closed after him and the mountain itself drifted up and over the trees as though it were but a cloud.

For a long while Ime remained motionless, not realizing the stiffness was no longer upon him and that he could move about if he wanted to. This he learned when he lost his balance and had to shift a leg forward to keep from falling.

Still afraid but curious now, he forced himself to advance and kneel beside the cloud-making fury. His brow twisted uncertainly as he saw it was like the Giver in more than just its color. It, too, was spreading out warmth—as it feasted.

Less frightened, he sent his hand out to pick up a piece of the strange appetite.

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It was then that it *bit* him—all the way up to his elbow. He shouted his most distressed, most shrieking pain-fright cries and ran all the way back to camp.

Treks later, he wasn't even too sure that it *had* been a dream. For, wasn't there all that hard, hairless skin on his hand and arm?

THESE things puzzled him anew as he stood in the dark forest staring up at the scraping limbs. And suddenly he had to know whether the long-ago experience might have been real after all.

He dropped to his knees and raked together all the leaves within reach. Then he searched the forest floor, gathering twigs and adding them to the pile. Nor did it take long to find a small, straight stick which he could make spin rapidly by rubbing it, point down, between his palms—just as the Shining One had done.

He placed it tip against a depression in a larger limb that lay in the pile. And he began making it spin first in one direction, then in the other.

It wasn't until his hands began to ache, however, that he saw the first trace of the black cloud from among the leaves.

Fascinated with what was happening, he blew upon the pile and twirled the sticks even more rapidly. There was an angry redness down there now—a small, licking tongue of warmth-giving stuff that crackled as it ate leaf after leaf and began consuming the twigs too.

Conscious of the arm that had been bitten by the red hunger long ago, he backed off to a safe distance and watched the leaping bits of vivid color grow—swiftly, fiercely—until they became a single, savage greediness that was big enough to eat on the entire pile at once.

And Ime saw it would soon have nothing left to consume unless he brought more leaves and branches. This he did while his chest swelled with satisfaction. Just as the creature-thing had once done, he himself had called down from the Upper Vastness a bit of the Giver. And by bringing it more food, he could keep it alive. By making certain there was no food within reach, he could cause it to die whenever he wanted.

HE gathered many large limbs and threw them into the hunger. It crackled delightfully while he sat with his chin on his knees and watched the roaring, crimson thing—a piece of the Giver Himself, drawn down from the blue Vastness and made to reside in a pile of leaves and sticks.

Ime studied the queer, some-

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times awesome sight and wondered what else the hunger might be made to do. Of what good was it? He shook his head regretfully. It was just as he had assured himself only a short while earlier—Trekker had no time for anything. Not even to think. After the next awakening they would be fleeing warmward from the cold. And he would have no further chance to call down the redness and see what it could do. Moreover, by the time he was back here where he could find dry leaves and sticks and branches, he would have again forgotten about the queer hunger and would be thinking once more that it had been only a dream.

Ime turned his back on the roaring, crackling thing. The Giver, whom he could see between the trees, had almost been swallowed up by the distant mountain. Soon the Upper blue would give way to gray, then to black and all the while Myshe would be alone in his shelter.

Trotting back through the gathering darkness, he was depressed as he realized he had missed his chance—that he should have decided to answer Broken Teeth's challenge many awakenings ago, instead of putting off the final fight in the hope that the other's eyes would lose their lustful eagerness for Myshe.

Now, with the trek getting under way as soon as the Giver returned, he would be able to do nothing about the mate stealer until they arrived in the warmlands.

But answering the challenge was not something he could keep on putting off. For there was always the chance that, after Myshe suffered the suffering and relieved herself of her fatness, Broken Teeth would take out his jealous anger on the Small Trekker.

IT was not quite dark when Ime reached the sleeping camp. But already some of the tiny brilliances were beginning to wink down at him from the Vastness and the chill of the wind moaning through the pass was as severe as though it were already weighted with the mushy whiteness.

He was relieved when he crawled into his shelter and, by the fading light, saw Myshe was awake and smiling at him.

She was small, as she-Trekkers went, and there was a simple neatness about her, despite her bulging stomach, that made him feel good to have her as his mate. Her eyes, large and ever searching his face, were like a trail twisting into his thoughts and he sensed that she could always feel what he had on his mind.

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He snuggled close and drew warmth from her body, aware at the same time of the slight movements of the Small Trekker who would soon be blinking his eyes against the light of the Giver.

How soon? Ime wondered. And he grimaced as he thought of the other fat she, treks ago, who remained too long in the suffering and who had to be left behind. Nor did anyone stay with her, for her mate had just before then been lost to the Swift, Four-Legged Ones. When the Trekkers had returned coldward next warmtime, they had found only her bones, together with a handful of smaller ones nearby.

Myshe was making small, contented sounds now and he held her closer, answering with deep, throaty sighs that let her know he felt like she did inside.

Again, their inner selves were touching and they were of one-thought.

HE must have slept a long while. For when he found himself suddenly awake again the Giver of Palelight had climbed into the Dark Vastness and was shedding its milkiness into the open end of the shelter.

Myshe had changed position and the weak light-without-warmth was touching her face, blending shadows and brightness and making her hair seem as though it were spun around a shaft of palelight.

Abruptly he sensed the presence of someone else in the lean-to. Drawing his muscles taut, he lay still and pretended to be asleep so he would have the advantage of surprise if he needed it.

He sniffed soundlessly, picking up the scent of Broken Teeth. And, even without looking, he called to mind an image of the brooding, savage face with its deep lines and ugly scars, its craglike rows of jagged tooth stumps.

There was the sudden crunch of foot on leaves and Ime rolled over, hurling himself aside just as the huge rock crashed down where his head had lain.

Snarling, he lunged for Broken Teeth, who only growled ferociously and twisted away from his grasping hands.

While his mate screamed, Ime clenched his hands together and swung his arms clublike towards the other's face.

But Broken Teeth snapped his head aside and took the full force of the blow on his shoulder. It sent him crashing through the flimsy side of the shelter.

Diving out after him, Ime tripped and pitched forward. When he regained his feet, Broken Teeth was in full flight up the side of the mountain.

It was just what Ime had

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hoped for since the last awakening—a chance to get the mate stealer alone, away from camp. It was even *more* than he had wanted. For now the other was without his spear. Snorting, Ime headed up the mountain in swift pursuit.

The gnawing cold was like the touch of rock water on flesh as he paused, listening to the sound of someone coming behind him, and glanced around.

Myshe, shivering and falling as she tried to mount the rocky slope, was struggling to overtake him. Even in the palelight he could see a trace of deep pain on her face. Beyond, the camp slept quietly in the heatless light of the Lesser Giver. And that was as it should be, for the fight over a mate did not concern the other Trekkers.

Her breath leaving clouds of fog behind, she reached him and seized his wrist, tugging him back toward the camp. When he wrenched his hand free, she made inviting sounds with her mouth, as though trying to set up the one-thought that they should return to their shelter together.

But he only caught her shoulders, turned around and pushed her toward the camp. Then he sprinted up the incline.

IN the deep, immense blackness of the forest he groped forward, guided by an occasional splotch of palelight that stabbed down out of the Vastness, until he drew back from a strangeness he had not encountered before. Up ahead there was a faint redness visible among the stout trunks. It was as though the Giver had decided to come early—and not from beyond the far mountains, but from the floor of the forest!

His ears and eyees no longer alert for Broken Teeth, he watched the redness growing stronger and weaker. Eventually he became aware of a faint, creaking noise and listened to it for some time before he recognized the sound of scraping limbs.

What he was looking at, then, was the hunger he himself had created. It was still alive, still eating on the pile of branches.

But more surprising was the fact which occurred to him only now—that it not only shed warmth like the Giver, but also sent out light which made the shadows shrink back!

Fascinated, he advanced until he could see the unsteady light of the feasting appetite falling upon his arms and chest. And it seemed for a moment that, although he was still some distance from the half-eaten pile of branches, he could feel its warmth upon him.

He continued on toward the

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Little Giver, anxiously gathering more twigs and sticks along the way. When he arrived before the leaping redness, he fed it and watched it grow in strength as it began consuming his new offerings. Puzzled, he stood there impressed over how the cold had fled from the clearing. And now he felt that he could almost see what use the Little Giver might be put to while it ate.

Underbrush rustled behind him and he spun around, crouching to receive the lunging weight of Broken Teeth.

But it wasn't the mate stealer who was approaching. It was Myshe, her face holding many expressions besides that of discomfort from the cold and pain from the nearness of the Small Trekker's arrival.

There were also surprise and fear, delight and careful attention in her eyes as she pushed past him and advanced with her arm extended toward the crackling redness.

He growled and slapped her hand down. And she seemed to understand that she should go no closer.

She sat and stared at the captive Giver stuff and the trembling slowly left her body. Her face turned toward him in a smile of well-being and once again Ime almost guessed what purpose the roaring appetite might serve.

Despite Myshe's contentment, however, the pain would not leave her stomach. He was made aware of her suffering by the occasional sounds of hurt that escaped her lips even though she tried to hold them back.

And he saw that, again, the chance to answer Broken Teeth's challenge had been snatched away. For now he would have to busy himself finding a long, forked branch and weaving a matting across the open limbs. It would have to be secure enough to support Myshe while he dragged the branch behind him and her along with it on the journey warmward.

Of course, he wouldn't be able to keep up with the other Trekkers. But he might avoid falling so far behind that the merciless cold would overtake him and his mate—and the Small Trekker.

IME was jolted from his thoughts by the spear that came hurtling out of the darkness and buried half of its length in the red hunger.

He whirled around and saw Broken Teeth's twisted face scowling out at him from the underbrush. The mate stealer, Ime realized, had doubled back, gotten his spears and re-entered the forest. And now that he held the advantage, the eagerness of his challenge was plain among the harsh lines of his mouth.

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He drew back another of his spears while Ime sent his hand groping behind him, reaching for the first lance that had stabbed into the crimson appetite.

Broken Teeth, too eager for the kill to be curious over the warmth and light of the Lesser Giver, held his second spear in readiness for a direct plunge and braced himself against the expected charge.

Seizing the spent lance, Ime drew it back like a club and hurled himself through the underbrush at the other. It wasn't until then that he saw he hadn't grabbed the spear at all, but had taken hold of a stout branch whose other end was being consumed by the restless eater. Even now the redness was leaping excitedly along most of its length as he swung the stick in front of him.

Broken Teeth's spear came forward in a vicious thrust and its tip tore through the flesh of Ime's shoulder. He didn't feel the pain, though, as his half-devoured club struck the other full in the face. A shower of red specks tore loose from the branch and Broken Teeth cried out in pain as the tiny brilliances buried themselves in his beard and began sending out clouds. Then, clawing at his face, he went lumbering blindly down the slope of the forest.

Ime gave chase, intent at first on completing the kill. But before he had run very far it occurred to him that he might not have to take Broken Teeth's life after all. For the mate stealer would long remember his encounter with the red hunger and would not be too quick to cast lustful eyes on Myshe again.

But with his next braking stride Ime's foot fell off into a depression between two half-buried rocks and he hurtled forward, his full weight pulling against the trapped ankle.

Even before he picked himself up and tried to stand on the foot, he knew it would not support him. Pain shot through his leg as he hopped back toward his mate. And, with a coldness in his stomach that was more biting than the raw wind all around him, he bowed before grim hopelessness.

Myshe had just started her suffering and would not bring forth the small one in time to start the march. This he knew because the light of the Giver was already beginning to flow up from behind the mountains.

And, with his ankle hurting and swelling as it was, he wouldn't be able to drag even himself along behind the others, much less his mate too.

HE crawled the remaining distance to the clearing and

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found Myshe resting for the moment as she lay beside the hunger. But the suffering, he knew, would return again and again until the Small Trekker came.

He dropped down beside her, trying to swallow the fear that was high in his throat. He had waited long for the small one. And now it was coming—but only in time to die in the dreadful cold.

He placed an arm around his mate. But she sat up and brought her face close to his, letting many expressions race one another across it. She was trying to bring about one-thought, but he couldn't imagine what.

Seeing his confusion, she swiftly gathered several twigs and arranged them in the shape of a tiny lean-to. Then she patted the ground all around them.

And one-thought came.

She wanted him to build a shelter—right where they were!

But why? In two or three awakenings the whiteness would be upon them, bringing the cold that killed. Already he had felt it creeping under his skin—until just a moment ago when he had returned to the Little Giver and Myshe.

But now he was so warm and comfortable that—

He bolted upright.

A shelter—*here!*

Its opening facing the roaring hunger!

He saw now that it was an appetite which would never be satisfied, would continue as long as he brought branches for it to devour.

And, in gorging itself, it would always cast much warmth and light into the shelter. Nor would it make any difference that there were fallen whiteness and rock water and raw winds outside.

Moreover, he would have no trouble at all keeping it busy eating. Around him were all the fallen branches that he could gather in a lifetime.

Now he was thoughtful and determined as the light of both the roaring hunger and the ready-to-rise Giver fell upon his eager face.

And suddenly he understood what the Little Giver *really* meant.

It meant that even while he attended the feasting thing he would still have plenty of time left over to set traps for the game that lived in the whiteness and to—think.

To think of, oh, so many things!

Of building a bigger lean-to.

Of finding a way to move heavy weights across the ground.

Of trying to make some of the food-bearing plants grow where he wanted them to.

And when the others returned next warmtime they would see

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that he and his mate and their Small Trekker were still alive and he would proudly show them the good hunger.

Myshe took his arm and pulled him down beside her. And, from the way she looked at him, he knew there was still one-thought between them—that she, too, felt all would be well.

Now, even though he realized he would have to hop around painfully for several passages of the Far-Away Giver, he was all anxious for the things he had to do—the things that he *wanted* to do.

First he would help Myshe with the final suffering that would soon be upon her.

Then he would have to feed the hunger.

And check the snares.

And start building their shelter.

Then, after his ankle became strong again, he would climb up the side of a rock and chisel upon it a thought that could be shared by all those who came after.

His thought-on-stone would concern the Mighty Glittering Mountain that had drifted down out of the Upper Vastness.

And it would also show the Shining Creature with the Round Head stooping and blowing upon the restless hunger and giving it the spirit to devour all the leaves and branches.

THE END

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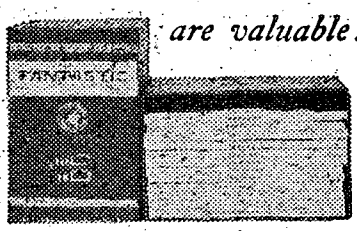

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SPECIMEN

By C. C. MacAPP

Illustrator SUMMERS

At first there was only gray awareness; then gradually, recognition of specific things: a throb in his head, aching joints, pebbles gouging into his back. One arm, folded across his chest, moved; and the feel of his skin made him think, I am naked. He puzzled over that for a while. Was there a condition other than nakedness?

HIS hand moved up to rub gingerly at a sore spot on his temple, and he thought, Electrode. His wits began to coalesce. His pulse grew stronger, quickened with hate. He forced himself to sit up, fought dizziness, and finally heaved himself erect to stand, sweating and gasping and sick, while strength dribbled into him. When he could lift his head he did so, to Curse them once more; seeing nothing, expecting no response and getting none.

As usual, he was in a patch of ground baked gray-brown and hard by a bulging coppery sun, surrounded by a jungle the elephantine leaves of which stirred faintly in a breeze he could not feel. Dankness and fragrance mingled familiarly. He could recall a series of such awakenings, stretching into the past until they were lost beyond the hazed horizon of memory.

Another memory, like an alarm bell, made him crouch suddenly, then dart for a particular spot in the jungle wall. He strained to see into the shadows, threw an anxious look behind him, and reached for familiar handholds on the bole of a great tree. He hauled himself, panting with effort, upward until he was twenty feet above ground, then slumped

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in a crotch and tried to keep from retching with the agony in his lungs.

In a few minutes he was able to creep up the slanting limb to where, hidden in a clump of leaves, he could watch the clearing.

Creatures of many shapes and sizes moved in the trees around him, but they stayed away from him and it was in his mind that nothing which could climb this high would challenge him.

THE enemy he awaited came fast not bothering with the stealth of which he was capable, but crashing through the brush and bursting into the open in full bounding stride. The broad head swung in a quick scrutiny that made the man crouch deeper among the leaves, then the enemy growled in frustration and padded slowly to the center of the clearing to sniff at the ground where the man had lain. He remembers well, the man thought; and despite the inescapable enmity, something in him reached out toward the tiger. That striped splended deadliness was of Earth, which could not be said of the trees nor of most of the creatures in them.

Earth. He burned the word resolutely into his memory, and kneeded at his memory for more; but nothing came except vague images that slipped like minnows from his grasp. Earth was an ache in the throat, a smarting in his eyes; a sense of time and distance so vast that the name itself was a miracle of memory. A copy of a copy of a copy so painfully transferred—how many thousands of times?—that he had small faith in its accuracy.

The tiger turned sinuously and slid into the jungle, and now a new memory stabbed into the man. He groaned at his own thick-wittedness. The drama wasn't complete without a woman. And the tiger, with his direct uncomplicated mind, always remembered.

The man knew that she would be activated at another place, and that to get there he must cross a river, but for the moment he could not remember the direction. He moaned and pounded at his head with his fist; then, in a sudden fury, clambered to where he could see the sky and screamed futile hatred at Them.

When he was calmer again, he remembered to wonder whether They existed. He *could* be insane. Yet, he had a dim memory of a time when he'd understood more; had known with certainty who They were and when They'd captured him.

He fingered various scars on his body, stared down at the long slanting ones across his chest. He thought that must have hap-

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pened at the most recent awakening; at least, the memory was very clear. The tiger had reached him before he got to the trees. He remembered screaming out his terror and rage, clawing at the tiger until his fingernails were all torn off, using his own teeth, even. Then, being snatched away into oblivion just as the claws slashed across his chest.

Whoever They were, they managed to keep their specimens healthy; the wounds were all thoroughly healed, and he felt young and strong now that the initial weakness had passed. He had no idea how long the periods of sleep might be; but unless his memory were completely unreliable, there had been hundreds, or thousands, of them. He wondered how old he was, in actual time elapsed. Or, for that matter, in total waking time.

HE began to tremble, remembering how it was to live with one of the women (of which They apparently had quite a supply). He wondered if he dared hope that this time it would be The One. The One hadn't been with him for many Activations now, but he remembered her clearly because she was to the others as this nameless planet's sun was to its small distant moons. He and she had added up to so much more than two; had rediscovered so many miracles, including that of language. Somehow she, far more than any of the others, made him think like a man again instead of an animal.

They seemed, he mused, to consider the women expendable (unlike himself). There was one agonized memory from a few times back, when he'd found himself trapped on a dead-end ledge while below him the woman—young, helpless, barely curving out of girlhood—had been torn to bits by a pack of dog-like things. He'd tried to die then (as he had on other occasions), hurling himself off the ledge to plummet toward the rocks below; but They'd plucked him away in mid-fall, the girl's last dying sounds echoing awfully in his mind as oblivion took him.

Anxiously, he climbed higher in the tree and stared around. Beyond the clearing on the far side, in the direction where the tiger had disappeared, bare rocky peaks thrust up above the jungle. They were not far, but he knew that wasn't the way.

From somewhere in that direction came an animal scream of agony, along with the tiger's roar. He's found himself a meal, the man thought. At least, he hasn't started for the woman yet.

He looked for the bough which would take him within swinging distance of the next tree, and let

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his muscles take him where they would. Gradually he grew surer, and no longer wandered aimlessly, but moved in a specific direction.

Though hungry and thirsty, and not yet fully recovered from the sleep, he forced himself on, feeling that he had to go a certain distance before stopping. The sun was overhead when he reached what he'd been dimly recalling—an edge of the jungle, where the great trees and their undergrowth were choked out by deep thick grass, yellowly billowing across a wide valley with snow-topped mountains beyond. Excitement made him tremble again.

He knew, though, that he must not go blindly. He stopped and let his aching body recover, munching meanwhile on a juicy red fruit which he picked confidently. Carefully now, making no noise, he sought out the familiar tall tree and made his way toward it and up its straight trunk.

Behind him lay the top of the jungle, swarming with birds and insects whose din his mind automatically filtered out. He sniffed for smells other than that of the jungle and the musty-sweet aroma of the grass. If the tiger was coming this way, he wasn't close enough to smell.

He could hear and smell the river, and see where a gap in the grass marked its undulating way. He could smell various animals in the grass, and identify them by their odors and by the way the grass-tops responded to their movements. I'm keen, he thought; With an animal's keenness. But the things that made me human keep slipping away.

IT WAS time to think of a weapon, and his eyes turned to the edge of the thicket below him. He spotted the kind of plant he wanted; a clumpish thing that sent long spiny shoots out radially from its compact center; but near it squatted an ugly gray animal with powerful tentacles. He knew the creature. It would be slow-moving but very strong, and he must not let it get a hold upon him.

He looked around carefully, then started down.

Before he approached the plant, he looked around for a rock of the right size and shape for chopping, as the spine he wanted would be very tough even at the base. Then he moved up quietly on the opposite side of the plant from the tentacled animal.

He chose a spine, grasped it with one hand and bent it as far as he could, and got in several good chops before the beast on the other side heard him and sent deceptively-smooth-moving limbs around toward him. The lumpish body followed.

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Impatiently, he gave ground, trying to lure the creature far enough away to lose it. After a few yards it declined to follow, and he had to tease it by throwing clods until, hissing angrily, it lunged after him.

He had to make four trips back to the plant, each interrupted by a return of the tenacious creature, before he had the spine chopped through enough to break it off. He eluded the reaching tentacles by inches, outdistanced the creature and lost it in the underbrush.

Things had come out of the grass to investigate the noise, but none that he really need fear. He had to go into that grass, for he remembered, now, the usual strategy. The tiger had to go far upstream to cross, where rapids kept the river creatures away, then come back down the other side. If one could cross here, hours would be gained.

He'd done it before, more than once, and he looked around for any of the several means he remembered.

There were no downed trees suitable for a raft, nor did he feel that creating a diversion upstream or down was a good gamble. He went back to the trees and climbed a few feet so he could see around.

A little way downstream, big gray lizzard-like heads poked above the grass. That was the tactic he would use, then.

He judged there was a good-sized herd of the great reptiles grazing there, though only a few at a time poked heads up to stare around. He knew that, though they were armored and armed to resist anything on this planet, somewhere they had been preyed upon, by what fearsome beast he could not imagine. They were unaggressive and preferred fleeing to fighting.

He made another cautious survey, then climbed down again and hurried into the grass.

IT WAS well over his head, the stalks as thick as his smallest finger, with rough-edged leaves that would have sliced a skin less tanned and leathery than his own. He went carefully at first, breaking down as few stalks as possible so as not to leave a visible trail. He did not go in a straight line, but took time to double back and create loops, crossing his own trail at odd angles to confuse any not-too-intelligent pursuer-by-scent. The few creatures he encountered paid him the compliment of avoidance.

He began pulling up grass, twisting and tying it into a crude rope. When he knew by the grunts and chewing sounds that he was close to the herd, he had a fair length of rope looped over his shoulders.

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He picked a spot a little ahead of the herd and moved in quietly until he was close to the river. He gathered together a number of grass-stalks and tied one end of the rope to them, securely. Then he moved back in an arc around the herd, paying out rope behind him until he ran out. There wasn't as much as he would have liked, but it might do.

He found some rocks and tossed a few farther on, beyond the herd. He could tell by the silence that the herd stopped grazing and lifted wary heads to stare around. One of them was so close he could hear the raspy breath and the rustling of its scaly hide.

He tossed another rock, and the herd started to move, not fast, enough, though, to show they were concerned.

At what he thought was the right moment, he pulled hard on the rope, making a swath of audible motion ahead of the herd.

They stopped, and now he heard a few frightened grumbles. He knew the language of these creatures, had studied their ways and the slow working of their minds. While they hesitated, listening, he opened his mouth and screamed out the terror-sound.

They bolted directly away from him, toward the river as he'd planned. It was like earthquake and thunder, punctuated with their shrill cries. He ran after them through the avenues of trampled grass, and caught up with the laggers just as the first of the herd hit the water.

He was in the open now, on a wide firm mud-bank that slanted down to the water. A quick glance in either direction showed a variety of animals fleeing upstream or down.

There were young with the reptiles, pale-skinned, with the scaly protection not yet formed. He'd watched the hatching at some time or other, knew that the young stayed with the herd as a *community responsibility*. Now, as the adults lumbered into the water, the young clambered aboard the wide backs, clinging with pink claws to the crevassed hides.

The man caught one of the last adults and swung aboard behind a cow-sized infant.

THE reptiles swam with their heads high, swinging them in a ponderous survey of the river. A few bent their necks to stare uncertainly at the man, but he lay still and they didn't bother him.

The creatures that lived in the river knew better than to attack the armed and armored adults, but halfway across a great eel-like thing lunged from the water and made a try for the infant in

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front of the man. As the sawteeth clamped upon a dangling leg, the infant cried out piteously, clinging desperately with its other three feet.

On impulse, the man threw himself forward and jabbed at the river-thing with his spear, hitting it near one eye. It let go of its prey, with a hoarse sound. It slid back into the water, then came lunging out again toward the man. He jumped away as far as he could without falling off the reptile's back.

But other adults had seen the attacker now, and were converging toward it. One grappled below the waterline with powerful clawed feet, then rolled, hoisting more of the eel-like thing's length from the water. The predator flopped and twisted madly, making the hoarse sound. Huge reptile heads darted toward it, and it died in shreds. For a while, the water convulsed as other things ate the remains.

The herd reached the far bank with no more trouble. The man jumped off and trotted out of reach. For some reason, he felt angry with himself for his display of compassion in helping the infant reptile. Finally, he realized it was because They were watching.

THERE was another grassland to be crossed on this side of the river; a wide one, dotted with marshes and clumps of trees, combed by fingers of the mountains reaching down close to the river. It was dangerous to travel hastily in the grass, but he dared not waste time, since the tiger always showed the consistent aim of finding and killing him and the woman as fast as possible. He did not know whether this was just the continuation of an old enmity, or whether They somehow planted the urge in the cat's brain.

He got into the grass and crept near the reptiles, who were just beginning to explore away from the river. Their grazing would blot out his trail. Then he started inland, detouring around a marsh he remembered, and doubling back once or twice to make sure nothing followed him. Then he paused to listen.

The grass was busy with creatures moving, according to their natures, toward or away from the commotion at the river. That was good, in that it lent some shield to his own movement. Once, something evidently smelled him, for a stealthy movement a few yards away stopped abruptly. He gripped his spear as his own nose identified the creature, but after a moment it detoured around him and went on.

He passed a grove of thorny bushes, then angled to his left. Soon the ground began to slant

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upward, then steepened until the grass became sparse. Before he was out of the cover he paused once again to scout and to confuse his trail, then left the grass and climbed quickly to the top of the ridge.

This long tentacle of land was weathered smooth, and a carpet of tiny plants had taken root. He ran easily for a while, climbing steadily, then stopped to look around. Ahead, the mountains loomed harsh and bare, the edge of the vast snowfield a blinding white line from this angle. On either side other ridges snaked down toward the river. Back there, seeming not far in the clear air, he could see the reptile herd, secure in their collective might again, lifting leisure heads to munch grass and stare around. He wondered if their brains were equipped to identify him as the same being who'd hitched a ride with them. In an impulsive gesture of affection, he waved an arm before going on.

To his left as he climbed, a snug valley between the ridges was watered by a fair-sized stream that wound through it. There were shrubs and flowering short grasses, and, along the stream, a thicket of medium-sized trees. He knew this valley well, for it had been his brief Eden in some previous awakenings when he'd been able to overcome the tiger and the other dangers and join the woman. Once, it had lasted for nearly a full season before They had grown bored (he presumed) with that particular Activation and ended it without warning.

He kept an eye on the opposite ridge, for the tiger would probably mount it if he came from up-river. He saw a few small animals that showed by their lack of nervousness that nothing threatening was in sight from that ridge either. He was very conscious that he'd lost more time than usual in getting his wits back, and very afraid the tiger was ahead of him.

The ridge became rockier, rising sharply toward one of the mountain ramparts. It was time to go down into the valley. He paused and caught his breath, relishing the feel of strength and stamina now that his body was recovered from the drugged sleep. Then he descended the slope.

IT WAS warm in the valley; with a smoky-musky-sweet smell of autumn that awoke some pang of nostalgia in his submemory. He drank from a tiny spring in the rocks, and found some nuts and berries. Later, if things went right, there would be small game or fish to cook over a fire on a safe ledge. Now there wasn't time.

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His senses told him where a band of small herbivores had ranged along the slope, and where three or four swift, six-legged predators had stalked them. He found remains of two kills from the previous night, which was good because the predators wouldn't be hungry and would avoid him. He read where a pair of big furry creatures, strong and wily, had fought off a dog-pack after their fresh-born cubs. That had been two days ago, and both defenders and routed attackers had gone on down the valley.

Finally, he found what he dreaded. A sign of the tiger.

He went fast now, letting his lungs fight for air, choosing a way that left the least danger of ambush. The valley narrowed and became a series of tiered levels, with cliffs to be climbed along the most direct route. For a good climber, it was the fastest way. The vegetation dwindled and he crossed bare rock. At last he came to the place.

It was an oval space, perhaps three hundred yards deep, with a fairly level color; surrounded on most of its perimeter by steep mountain walls, with a sheer drop-off at the downhill end. A bare natural amphitheater (or a contrived one, he didn't know which). Down a cleft at the far end tumbled the stream, from the snows out of sight above. Bulges and convolutions, ledges and caves were all around the walls. He thought he knew them all. He'd been here often enough.

He eased himself up and crouched at the edge of the drop-off, alert for the faintest scrape of claw on rock. He thought he smelled tiger, but heard nothing. He sniffed again, and fear squeezed at his insides. He smelled blood.

He moved silently to the wall on his right and edged along it. He rounded the first bulge and found nothing. He went along a concavity and peered around another bulge, and saw the dark stains on the rocky floor.

His throat tight with anxiety, he studied the pattern of the stains. There were several spots the size of his hand, scattered enough to indicate a struggle, and a trail of small splashes leading straight toward the wall. They disappeared beyond the next bulge.

It looked as if the tiger had caught her—still groggy, perhaps, from the awakening—and dragged her away.

Disappointment and rage filled him. He gripped his spear so hard his fingers ached, and ran without caution to the bulge in the wall.

His eyes flashed along the trail of blood-droplets and he gasped with new hope. The trail led to the wall, and up it.

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He could read, now, actually two trails. The second turned aside at the wall and paralleled it farther up into the amphitheater. It appeared—though he hardly dared hope—that she had not only escaped, but wounded the tiger, which had gone to some cave to hide.

HE looked up the wall, remembering there was a ledge there. He was so excited he couldn't make a sound at first, but finally managed, "Hough!"

"Uhh," came a weak answer, and his heart sang.

Fifty feet up, a face looked over the brink of the ledge. It was She. He felt his face tug into a tearful smile, and he trembled all over like a child.

Her face was strained He tried the unpracticed speech again. "You . . . hurrh?"

"I . . . I . . . " she tried, and frowned in defeat. Wincing, she moved so that one thigh was in sight. The long deep gashes were not bleeding now, but he could tell the leg was so stiff as to be almost useless.

He thought what it must have been like for her, pounced upon while she was still sick and dull-witted, escaping somehow and being trapped, hurt and hungry and cold, on the ledge. His eyes watered again.

"Tiger . . . hurd?" he asked, doing a little better.

"I . . . . He . . ." she tried, and made chopping motions at the side of her head. She pointed to a small loose rock not far from him, which, he now saw, had blood on it. He considered, amazed. It had been a miracle for her to find the rock at hand, and to hurt or stun the tiger with it.

Or, possibly They had taken a hand.

He looked along the wall toward where the tiger must be, and made a tentative move in that direction.

"No!" she protested. "You . . ."

He tried to talk to her, growled in exasperation at the elusive words, and pointed at the sun, which was already near setting. He made eating and drinking signs, and huddled and shivered to imply cold. She sobbed in fear, but he knew she understood that he must deal with the tiger quickly so that he could help her down.

As he went, he reviewed what he remembered of the terrain around the next outcropping. There were several caves there. He didn't know whether the tiger was seriously hurt, or had just holed up, waiting its time.

The trail of blood petered out, but he could smell the cat's route. It wasn't in the first cave, but he thought it was in the next one, which was small but deep enough to be dark.

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He looked around and chose a comparatively smooth spot out from the wall, then gathered a few good throwing stones and stepped into the open. He stared into the darkness of the cave he suspected, and saw twin points of light.

He threw a rock and grunted in exasperation as he missed the cave entirely. I should have practiced throwing, along the way, he thought. The second throw was good, and brought forth a furious roar.

THE cat came out in a rush. There was an instant to see the trivial wound behind one eye, swelling it partly shut but insignificant. He shivered a little at the clear intelligent murder in the open eye. He marvelled at the implacable will. He'd hurt the cat badly, more than once, and he was sure it remembered; but there wasn't the tiniest hesitation.

He crouched, holding the spear low and pointed umoving toward the cat. The issue was one of reflexes now, and if the feline brain weren't alerted to the spear, it wouldn't be able to react in time. He watched the body drop low, tense, the leg muscles bunched. Then the cat was in its spring. Smoothly, he brought up the spear, bracing himself, keeping his eyes on the exposed pale fur of the chest.

Something invisible hit the spear, knocking it aside.

He reacted fast, letting his legs go limp, but before gravity could pull him to the ground, the cat struck him. He squirmed instinctively, trying to escape the clutching forepaws, but he felt the eager claws dig into the backs of his shoulders. He strained mightily to free his left arm, and was able to get it in front of his face. The vise-like bite crunched down on the bone of his forearm. Awkwardly, his right arm half imprisoned, he jabbed with the spear, felt it glance off the feline's ribs. He jabbed again but knew he wasn't doing much good.

Through the shock and pain came the realization that They had knocked his spear aside. "Damn you!" he screamed with what breath he had, "Damn you, damn you!"

The oaths turned to sobs in his throat as he thought of Her, alone and crippled, freezing, starving, or coming down to face the cat. He summoned all the will and strength he had left, aimed the spear as deliberately as he could, and thrust again.

The tiger screamed and twisted as the point went in just below the ribs. The man went limp for a second, incredulous. I've done it, he thought. I've done it! They'll have to snatch him now, and sew up his guts!

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Maybe, he thought, they'll snatch Her too; or at least she'll have some chance to get down to where there's food and warmth.

He was already fainting when he felt the frantic talons rip across his middle, parting the taut muscles. Hazily, he wondered if his viscera were popping out. Then the tiger was gone.

He supposed it was only an instant later that he too felt the whirling, implosion-like sensation of the snatch. In the last iota of consciousness he thought, maybe they waited too long this time. Maybe I'll die. He clung to that small hope, dragging it with him into the familiar oblivion.

THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH

Imagination runs wild in Robert F. Young's Deluge II, which is featured in the October issue of FANTASTIC.

Take Aesop's fable about the mouse and the lion; the story of Noah; William Faulkner's Sanctuary; and a world of the future where the normal patterns of life and love and hate are all reversed. Add them up: you get Deluge II, destined to be one of the most talked-about stories of 1961.

In the same issue **Joseph Kelleam** returns with a gem of a fantasy about two men who seek to steal a jewel not knowing that they are going to be confronted by the *Last Druid.* And the Fantasy Reprint of the month will be *The Mother,* by **David H. Keller, M.D.,** a classic exploration of a world where science attempts to conquer human nature.

The October FANTASTIC will also bring to a conclusion the great serial, *Magnanthropus.* PLUS short stories and all our regular features. October FANTASTIC goes on sale Sept. 19.

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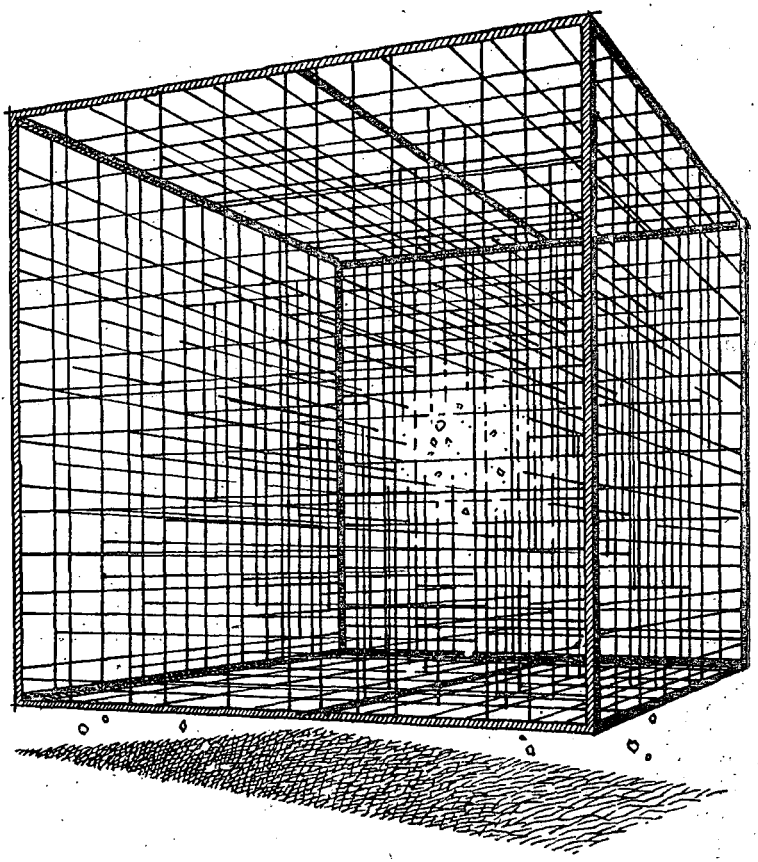

THE GENIE

By A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

Illustrator SCHELLING

Do not make a rabbit stew before you catch your rabbit. Conversely, do not count your demon-profits before you uncatch your demons.

CAPTAIN Huygens sipped his brandy appreciatively, watched the blue smoke curling upwards from his Havana cigar. Clavering paid him well for everything that he brought in from strange worlds suitable for inclusion in the millionaire's pri-

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vate museum—but these civilized evenings, thought Huygens, were almost payment enough. Almost.

"You haven't seen the collection recently, Captain?" asked Clavering.

"No," admitted Huygens, regarding the prospect of having to rise from his easy chair with distaste. "In any case," he went on lazily, "most of the exhibits will be things that I got for you . . ."

"Most of them," agreed his host. "Most of them. But there are some quite amusing oddities to be picked up even on Earth."

"Such as?"

"A Tibetan ghost trap, for example."

Huygens snapped into sudden alertness. He was owner as well as master of an interstellar tramp, had contrived for quite a few years to keep his flag flying in spite of the competition of the Interstellar Transport Commission. He smelled business—and much as he enjoyed an excellent dinner with brandy, cigars and conversation to follow he had no intention of letting such enjoyment stand in the way of honest, or more or less honest, trade.

"You've heard of them?"

"Frankly, no, Clavering. But I'd like to see one."

"Then come this way."

The spaceman followed the millionaire from the book-lined study, along a corridor. The door at the end of it was locked, but Clavering produced a key, opened it, switched on the lights. The glare was reflected from the glass of showcases, from some of the things inside the cases, from the priestly vestments of Altairian crystal silk, from the ornate, jewelled hourglass that was carried by the Darshan abbots, from the glittering hilt and blade of the Shaaran ceremonial sword.

The contraption inside the case towards which Clavering led Huygens neither gleamed nor glittered. It was a complexity of bamboo struts, of threads of some animal or vegetable fibre that had once—centuries ago?—been brightly colored but that were now dull with age. It was like, thought Huygens, a maze, a model maze. He tried to sort out, mentally, the paths into and out from the center; gave it up. He would have hated to have been trapped in a real, life-sized maze of this nature.

"How does it work?" he asked.

"You mean," corrected Clavering, "how was it supposed to work?"

"As you please. How?"

"Frankly, I'm not sure. I think that some sort of . . . bait? was put inside. Then the ghost or demon or whatever went in after it, and couldn't get out. I don't know what happened then. Perhaps the trap was taken out to

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sea and dumped, the same way as they used to dump radio-active wastes at one time . . ."

"Tibet is quite a few miles from the sea," pointed out Huygens mildly.

"Is it?"

"Yes." The Captain laughed. "It's really amazing, Clavering, that a collector of religious curiosa such as yourself should exhibit such an abyssmal ignorance of religions."

"I suppose it is. But for my collection I demand only one thing, rarity. Oh, I try to get the *feel* of all the things, the essential feel. I can look at that Shaaran ceremonial sword, for example, and *see* the Queen using it to lop off the head of any drone who's outlived his limited usefulness . . ."

"It was used," said Huygens drily, "to slit the pupae casings of newly reared Queens, it being held among the Shaara that the Queen must do no work whatsoever, from earliest infancy onwards."

"Damn you, Huygens." Clavering brightened. "But your story's almost as good."

"Do you think I could borrow that trap?" asked the spaceman.

"Borrow it? What in the Galaxy for?"

"To get a copy made."

"A copy? I've heard of spaceships being infested with rats and other pests, but ghosts? . . ."

Huygens laughed with Clavering: Then—"I should like a copy made," he said. He pulled his check-book from his pocket. "If you like, I'll leave a deposit. What you paid for it." He added, "And I promise you a story about it."

"The story will do, Captain," said the millionaire. "When you get back from your next voyage."

"When I get back," promised Huygens.

HUYGENS stood on the fire-scarred concrete of the Port Woomera spaceport, talking with Carradine, his Mate, looking frequently and with increasing irritation at his wristwatch. Looming over the two men was the blunt-spired tower that was their ship, the vessel that Huygens, who was something of a historian in his spare time, had named *Barrow Boy*. (Everybody had told him that ships, being of the female gender, should bear feminine names, but he had only said, "She's such an ugly son of a gun that her name doesn't matter, anyhow.") She had been built as a monitor for the Navy of the Empire of Waverley, had spent most of her naval service loafing around in various military spaceports and then, having achieved an honorable obsolescence, had been sold as scrap. Huygens, who had just won a big prize in the Solar Lottery and

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who was Chief Officer in one of the Commission's *Delta* class ships, had snapped her up. Unkind I.T.C. acquaintances were often heard to say that it was a great pity that her guns had been removed before the sale. With them, Huygens could have become an *honest* pirate.

Huygens looked at his watch again, then up at the sky.

"That damned flying boxcar's late as usual," he swore.

Carradine looked at the ship, at the vessel that he, as Mate, had secured for Space. All cargo ports were closed and sealed. All conveyor belts and gantries had been wheeled back to give the regulation clearance. Only the after, personnel airlock remained open.

"Must be a light cargo, Captain," he ventured. "Or a small shipment . . ."

"Yes. It's light."

"Might I ask . . . ?"

"Yes. You might. You're the Mate, you should know what we're carrying."

"Then what . . . ?"

Huygens watched the expanding speck that had appeared in the sky, the flying boxcar. There would be no chance now that word would leak about this last and (he hoped) most remunerative item of his cargo—and no chance, either, that he would lift from Port Woomera borne on a gale of unkind laughter.

"Ghost traps," he announced.

"I beg your pardon, Captain. I thought you said 'ghost traps' . . ."

"I did," Huygens told him.

KORAKI is a pleasant enough world.

Its humanoid natives are civilized, having reached a technological level comparable with that of Earth in late Victorian days. They have coal burning steamships and railways, a fairish metallurgy. They wish neither to fight nor to worship as gods visitors from the stars, but only to trade with them.

There was only one thing wrong with the planet.

It was infested with malignant demons.

Barrow Boy sat squatly in the middle of the grassy field that served Ahuri, capital of Koraki's most powerful nation, as a spaceport. Inside the ship, in his cabin, sat Captain Huygens. Carradine, the Mate, was also seated. Fiorelli, Reaction Drive Chief Engineer, was not. He was on the carpet.

"Thanks to the failure of your rockets," said Huygens, "we dropped all of five feet. Mr. Carradine tells me that Number One vane is badly buckled as a result. I should like your report on its condition as soon as possible. If a replacement is required I shall have to put in the order to the

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Taranaki Foundry without delay."

Fiorelli scowled, made a gesture that could have been interpreted as a salute, slouched out of the room.

"It's a good job," said Huygens, "that Vynalek always keeps the Mannschenn Drive up to scratch. If *that* went on the blink . . ."

"I never did believe those Time Travel stories," said the Mate.

"No? Bear in mind that those ships that vanish must go somewhere. Or somewhen."

Somebody rapped smartly on the door. The Purser entered. He announced irreverently, "His Nibs has just come aboard."

"Then show him up. And while you're about it, get somebody to lug up one of those cartons from the Specie Room—you know, the ones that we loaded just before we blasted off."

"Can do," said the Purser.

"Insolent puppy," muttered Huygens to his retreating back. "He would never have done for the I.T.C." He grinned. "And neither would you, Carradine, with your wenching in every port."

"And why not, Captain? It's in my own time. And don't forget, if I hadn't been nice to that female Commissar on Nova Smolensk we'd never have got that ore charter."

"All right, all right. Just try to keep yourself under control here, that's all. The natives are rather fussy about morals."

"But they aren't even human," protested Carradine.

"Human enough."

He was interrupted by the Purser who, holding himself with unwonted stiffness and straightness, intoned, "His Holiness the High Priest of Manakau . . ."

Captain and Mate jumped to their feet, bowed politely to the being who had followed the Purser into the cabin. The High Priest would have passed for human, even on close inspection. He was short and tubby, looked a little absurd in his gorgeous robes. His face conveyed the impression of shrewdness rather than that of holiness.

He talked English with only a slight accent—almost a Cockney accent. He dropped his aitches, but did not, as do those born within sound of Bow Bells, put them back in the wrong places. It all made, Huygens often thought, for a more streamlined speech.

He said, "Good day to you, Captain. And Mr. Carradine. May your 'ome be free from 'auntings."

"And yours, your 'Oliness," replied Huygens. "Holiness," he corrected himself.

"And what treasures have you

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brought for us from your distant 'ome?"

"Books, Your Holiness. Wine. Synthetic cloths."

"That is good. Within minutes the monastery wagons will be outside your airlock." He looked at the spacemen shrewdly, his head cocked a little to one side. "There is something more, Captain 'Uygens."

"There is," admitted Huygens.

The Third Mate staggered into the Captain's day cabin, carrying a large carton. He dumped it on the deck and then, with a put upon expression, took his stance against a bulkhead. Like every other crew member he knew that the ship had been delayed to await delivery of those cartons. He wanted to know what was in them.

"Open it, Mr. Taylor," ordered the Captain.

The Third Mate bent down, jerked the dangling tag. The top of the carton gaped open. Taylor lifted out a couple of sheets of corrugated packing board, then something flat and gaudy, a frame of plastic rods, a criss-crossing of brightly colored nylon threads. He looked at it with puzzlement, handed it to the Captain.

HUYGENS grinned. His square, capable hands tensed. There was a sharp click. He was holding a construction in three dimensions—but only three?—a complex cage that seemed more decorative than functional.

"It is very pretty," admitted His Holiness. "What is it, 'Uygens?"

"A trap," said Huygens.

"A trap? But the colors will frighten any small animal."

"This is a ghost trap."

"A ghost trap? Then, perhaps, our demons . . ."

"I hope so, Your Holiness."

"But how can I be sure of its value? You Earthmen, as I know to my cost, are shrewd bargainers . . ."

And so are you, thought the Captain. He said, "Traps like this were once used on Earth. This shipment I had copied from an old model . . ."

"An *old* model?"

"Yes. The traps have not been used for generations. There is no need for them any longer."

"So Earth no longer 'as demons?"

"No."

"We need not trap them all," said the High Priest to himself. Then, to Huygens, 'Ow do they work?"

"Very simply. They have to be baited, of course. The demon is attracted by the bait—and then is trapped in that maze of threads. It can't get out."

"But the bait?"

"I've thought of that. As far

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as I can gather, your demons tend to specialize. There's one . . . tribe? that delights in wrecking ships or, at the very least, causing great annoyance to their crews. There are the railway demons. There are the agricultural demons. There are the general purpose demons.

"Anyhow, suppose that we want to clear one of your surface ships of these supernatural saboteurs. The Bursar of your monastery sells the traps to the Captain—and he sells, with the traps, tiny models of the ship, made as far as possible to exact detail. I know that your monks are expert model makers. The models will be used as bait. The demons won't be able to resist them, any more than a man can resist a beautiful model. They'll want to break them. And then, when they're inside the traps, they'll find that they can't get out."

"And then?"

"Frankly, Your Holiness, I haven't worked that out. After all—you're the expert in these matters. I'm just a spaceman. Prayer and fasting, perhaps? Incantations? Dumping at sea? Throwing off cliffs? Burning?"

"We 'ave," said the priest, "a particularly bothersome demon in the monastery itself. It delights in tearing the pages of books, rare books. With the microphotographic equipment you brought us on your last voyage Brother Taranui shall duplicate such a book, in miniature, and Brother Te Aro, 'o is famed for 'is miniature illuminations, shall be responsible for the cover. I shall take this sample ashore with me, and tonight it shall be tested. If the results of the test are favorable . . ."

"Thank you, Your Holiness. And now, may I suggest refreshment?"

"It is kind of you, Captain. If I might 'ave some of that excellent cordial you call Van der 'Um . . . ?"

"It will be a pleasure."

There was a knock at the door. Fiorelli shoved his scowling face into the cabin. "It's had it," he announced. "It's completely buggered. Fatigue, that's what it was, not a half inch fall. That vane'll have to be renewed."

"All right. Thank you," said Huygens curtly to the Reaction Chief. "I'll see you later." He turned to the priest. "There is one other matter, Your Holiness. It is necessary that the services of the Taranaki Foundry be made available to us. We have a vane to renew."

"To 'elp you is a pleasure, Captain 'Uygens," said the High Priest.

IT WAS the following morning. Huygens and Carradine sat in the Captain's cabin. From the

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unscreened ports they could watch the heavy wagons, each drawn by a pair of elephantine beasts, trundling away from the ship. Their normal cargo, the routine merchandise, was being discharged. The profits would more than pay the costs of the voyage. Those ghost traps, if they sold, would be the icing on the cake.

"I still find it hard to believe all this talk about demons," said the Mate. "I've always regarded it as just a priestly racket. Oh, I admit that odd things do happen here—like small objects getting mislaid and then, after a frantic search, turning up just where you knew you'd put them in the first place. At Melikai's house last night . . ."

"I thought you said that the women here weren't human."

"She's different. Anyhow, we couldn't find the corkscrew. After I'd smashed the neck of the bottle—and lost a good third of the wine—the damned thing turned up just where we'd first looked." He added, "But those things happen anywhere at all. Everywhere."

"Perhaps the demons are everywhere," said Huygens.

"'Ere's 'Is 'Oliness," remarked Carradine, pointing with the stem of his pipe to the ornate carriage that was approaching the ship. The two men got up from their chairs, walked to the port so that they could look down to the ramp of the after airlock. They saw the High Priest dismount, assisted by a pair of native cargo workers who had dropped the bale they were carrying to pay their respects to their spiritual—and temporal—ruler. They saw a lesser priest get out of the carriage, unassisted. They watched something bright and gaudy being handed from the vehicle to the High Priest's aide, saw the man almost drop it and then hold it in a peculiarly gingerly manner, well away from his body.

It was one of the traps.

"It's caught something," said Carradine. "A rat, maybe. Or the local equivalent. Melikai was telling me that they have animals here like Terran rodents that are almost as big a pest as the demons. Perhaps next trip we might show a profit on a nice line of rat poison . . ."

"Can your girl friend talk English?" demanded Huygens.

"As a matter of fact, no . . ."

"Can you talk Koriki?"

"No . . ."

"I know that people can express themselves very well by sign language," said Huygens, "but . . ."

"As a matter of fact," admitted Carradine, "I borrowed the psionic interpreter out of the Stores."

"We will discuss the matter

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later," said Huygens. He heard voices in the alleyway outside, remarked, "Here they are."

Ushered in by the Purser, the two priests entered. While the Captain and the High Priest exchanged greetings the underpriest set his burden on the table, jumping back from it as soon as he released his hold on it.

"See," said the High Priest.

The spacemen saw.

They saw the flimsy affair of brightly colored rods and threads being shaken violently by something invisible. They saw the miniature snowstorm in its center as tiny fragments of paper whirled and eddied. They felt a chill, a fear. Huygens had not thought that the traps would really work, although he had seen enough on his visits to Koraki to induce a half belief in the demons. He had thought that the imported traps would be a fine, priestly racket whether they worked or not.

Well, they worked.

"We will accept delivery," said His Holiness.

"We have to agree upon a price," said Huygens, motioning to Carradine to break out the Van der Hum bottle and the glasses.

"There are twenty bales of choice *koromiko* furs in my warehouse," said the High Priest.

"If there were thirty . . ." murmured Huygens.

"Possibly a set of Brother Taranui's miniatures . . ."

"Possibly two sets, Your Holiness."

So it went on, and inside the flimsy-seeming cage the miniature snowstorm raged unabated.

THE Taranaki Foundry, as Huygens had discovered in the past, did a good job of work, but it was slow. At first the Captain was inclined to fret—after all, a ship laid up in port is spending money, not earning it—but, after a while, he started to enjoy himself. It was a long time since he had been able to take a holiday, and Koraki was as good a world as any upon which to do so. And Lloyd's would stand some of the losses—and, as for the rest, the depleted profit for the year would help to keep his income tax down.

He did not stay aboard the ship, getting in everyone's hair. He travelled, riding free on the railways, on a warrant issued by the High Priest, all over the continent. He stayed in the monasteries, in each of which he could be sure of finding somebody who could talk English, in each of which the standard of board and lodging was very high indeed.

And, for it would have been out of character for him to be entirely idle, he investigated the possibilities of future markets. The Mate had been right, he dis-

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covered, about the local rodents. When he returned to the ship he would tell the Bio-Chemist to carry out research on the effect of various poisons on the pests. (It was just as well, he thought, that the ghosts or demons could not be disposed of so easily. He allowed himself to wonder how the traps were working.)

On his return to the capital he found out.

The first thing that he found out, however, was that repairs to the damaged tail fin had not been completed—in fact they had barely been initiated. He strode up the ramp to the after airlock in a vile temper, yelling for Carradine and for Fiorelli. He was in his day cabin, seated glowering behind his desk, when the Mate and the Reaction Chief came in.

He snarled, "I expect my senior officers not to be entirely helpless during my absence."

"The loading has been completed," said Carradine, adding, "sir."

"To hell with the loading! What about the repairs?"

"I've been trying to get hold of you," said the Mate.

"And why couldn't you?"

"Because your High Priestly friend has control of all communications on this blasted planet, that's why! The semaphore towers are operated by the priesthood, and so are the short wave transmitters and receivers that we've been bringing out to them."

Huygens allowed his manner to soften towards his executive officer. He said, "Sit down, Carradine." When the Engineer also made a move towards a chair the Captain froze him with a glare. He went on, "Now tell me, in words of one syllable if necessary, just what has been happening."

"It's the traps," said the Mate.

"Don't they work?"

"Oh, they work all right. Too well, if anything. But the problem is to get rid of what's inside them." He paused, filled and lit his pipe. "You've seen those cage type traps for small animals. If you want the animal alive and kicking you just give him a whiff of anaesthetic gas and fish him out. If you don't want him alive you dunk the trap in a bucket of water. But these ghosts or demons or poltergeists or whatever they are are a different kettle of fish."

"How so?"

HOW do you destroy a ghost? How do you destroy a being that's both immaterial and immortal? Bear in mind, too, that these beings, even though trapped, can still exercise influence over anybody susceptible within a certain range. Anybody —or anything. For example—traps have been dumped at sea.

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And many of those traps have been washed ashore—broken, torn literally to pieces. The evidence seems to indicate that various marine arthropods have been employed to break them open. On land, household animals have been used the same way. And some people."

"Metal," said Huygens thoughtfully. "Good, strong metal—not flimsy plastics . . . That should take care of *that.*"

"But not *now,*" complained the Mate. "And it's now that we're concerned with. The trouble is that the demons are escaping almost as fast as they're trapped. And they're a bad tempered bunch of blackards. Before, they were malicious, but little more than an annoyance. Now they're a very real menace."

"That comes within the High Priest's province," said Huygens.

"I know. And he's dealing with it. Every trap that's made a catch is brought at once to his warehouse, which is guarded by armed priests known to be insusceptible to supernormal influences. Soon he'll have all the traps that we brought stowed in there—all those, that is, that haven't been broken beyond repair."

"And what bearing has this upon our repairs?"

"Plenty. Repairs will be completed if and when you accept his terms."

"Which are?" asked Huygens.

"That we remove all the traps."

"It would mean completely discharging all our homeward cargo. Even then, we'd never have the space."

"His Nibs thought of that. He's been experimenting. Even when folded, the traps still hold whatever they've caught."

"Oh." For a few minutes the shipmaster considered the possibility of making repairs by cannibalizing his own ship, tearing down a bulkhead to get the metal to make the new vane, using his crew for labor. It might work but it would, inevitably, weaken the ship's structure and, in the event of any further damage, he wouldn't have a leg to stand on insofar as Lloyd's was concerned.

The Purser rapped at the door.

"'Is 'Oliness," he announced.

"Show him in," said Huygens tiredly.

BARROW BOY lifted from Koraki after not too long a delay.

Once Huygens had agreed to the High Priest's terms, the repairs had been put in hand once more, had been carried out in record time. Perhaps, thought the Captain, rather too fast. He would have liked to have been able to reach some decision as to what to do with his unwanted

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cargo. He was too good a spaceman to consider dumping the cages in Deep Space. It was probable that they would drift harmlessly for all eternity—but it was possible that they might constitute a menace to other spacemen far more deadly than the uncharted meteor swarm or the temporal fault. Even so, he was beginning to glimpse profit making angles. His millionaire friend, Clavering, had paid a fancy price for the original antique Tibetan trap; how much more would he pay for a trap complete with trapped demon? And there were other wealthy collectors throughout the colonized Galaxy.

Anyhow, *Barrow Boy* lifted away and clear on her reaction drive, vanishing from sight as soon as she was lined up for the home system and the interstellar drive switched on. The High Priest's worries were over.

For a while, for a short while, there was little to worry about aboard the ship save the problem of the disposal of the unwanted cargo. And then . . .

It was, at first, merely a matter of atmosphere. No, not physical atmosphere; pumps and algae vats were functioning as well as ever. But there was that feeling of strain, of fear, an irrational dread of the dark—and there was far too much dark outside the control viewports. There was the intense claustrophobia—and spacemen, who live all their working lives in tin coffins, are not as a rule claustrophobes. There was, illogically enough, the agorophobia that came with it—and spacemen, used to the vast emptinesses outside their flimsy ships, should not be agorophobes. There was the tension, and there was the hostility that would blaze up, without apparent cause, among the crew members.

Barrow Boy was not a happy ship any more and Captain Huygens knew why. He had gotten to the stage of making up his mind to dump the traps, regardless of future consequences, when the Mate came to him in his cabin.

"Yes, Mr. Carradine?" he asked tiredly.

"It's Fiorelli, sir. I think you should see him."

"What's he doing?"

"He's made himself a planchette, or whatever you call those things. He's got it running over a sheet or paper that's taped to his desk. He claims that he's getting orders from . . . *Them.*"

"*Them?*"

"Yes. Those damned things in the cages."

HUYGENS unsnapped the buckles of the belt that was holding him to his chair. He followed the younger man into the alleyway, into the axial shaft.

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He was hard on the Mate's heels as Carradine "swam" along the tube to the level in which the engineers' quarters were located. The two of them burst into the Reaction Chief's cabin almost simultaneously.

There was no sign of Fiorelli.

The sheet of paper was still on the desk, taped to the steel veneer. On it stood a peculiar little instrument—a heart shaped affair of plastic running on three ball bearings. There was a socket holding a pencil that stood vertically to the planchette's surface. The ball bearings were of steel, and magnetized, holding the device so that the blunt pencil point was in contact with the paper.

The once-white sheet was covered with scrawls. There were obscene, doodled sketches, accompanied by other graffiti that would not have looked out of place on the walls of a low class public urinal. There were the words written largely and blackly, over and over, *Let us out.*

Huygens cursed briefly, pushed past the Mate and kicked himself into the alleyway, making for the axial shaft again. He made the best speed he could to the level in which was the Specie Room. Before he got there he could smell the smoke, the fumes, the hot metal.

The door gaped open, the edges of the ragged hole around where the lock had been still glowing red. Left dangerously untended, the cutting torch still flared whitely. And Fiorelli was there, inside the Specie Room, throwing out splintered plastic rods, tangles of brightly colored nylon cords. Fiorelli was there, but he was not alone; around him swirled what had the appearance of a grey mist, a living fog that held a hint of writhing forms. And some of the traps were opening of themselves, it seemed—unfolding, then collapsing again into their flattened state.

And the fog was thickening, was deepening in color to a dirty black smoke.

Huygens started towards the engineer, then paused.

He heard what every interstellar spaceman dreads to hear—an irregularity in the sound of the Mannschenn Drive, that half understood complexity of ever-precessing gyroscopes, the device that by twisting Time has enabled Man to conquer Space. The thin, high keening, felt rather than heard, was becoming thinner, higher, rising in pitch to inaudibility. And there was the temporal disorientation and the insistent clangor of the alarms (but was he hearing them now, or would he hear them, or had he heard them?) and the distorted perspective and the sagging of all color down the spectral band . . . And the blackness.

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SO THIS, thought Huygens, was what happened to interstellar ships when their drives went on the blink. The spacemen's stories, sneered at by authority, were right after all. And it was all logical. The Mannschenn Drive makes use of the principle of temporal precession. A starwagon, going ahead in Space, goes astern in Time so that trans-Galactic voyages may be accomplished in weeks, objective and subjective, instead of in millenia. A Mannschenn Drive unit out of control will, therefore, be a Time Machine and will throw the ship into the Past.

Carradine looked up from his calculations with a sigh.

"Well," demanded his Captain, "where are we? Or should I ask, when are we?"

"I can tell you where," said the Mate. "We are approaching Earth from north of the Plane of the Ecliptic. There's not much doubt about that. We've seen Saturn—and there's nothing quite like the Rings anywhere else in the Galaxy. And worlds whose moons are almost large enough to be sister planets rather than satellites are rare, too . . . That's Earth, all right. And, of course, there's the Asteroid Belt . . ."

"So we can't be too far in the Past. But have you any idea of the year? The century?"

"No. If these blasted poltergeists would keep out of the computer I might be able to run it up. As it is . . ."

"If I thought that Fiorelli had any control over them," said Huygens, "I'd give him his freedom . . ."

"They were controlling *him*," remarked Carradine glumly.

"I'm not so sure. There was a certain amount of malice, on his part, involved. Anyhow, we shall be able to make the landing without him. His Second is quite capable of handling the rocket drive."

"So you intend to land, Captain?"

"Of course."

"Shouldn't we hang off in orbit, first?"

"We should. But we're not a survey ship. We haven't the gear to make a thorough inspection from Space."

"Straight down?"

"Straight down—and the sooner we get it over with, the better. The sooner we're down, the sooner our passengers will be able to find somebody else to annoy." He played with his cigar case. "And we may be able to orient ourselves in Time. We may even be able to get back . . ."

"If we're lucky," said Carradine, returning to his calculations. Then he cursed bitterly as his stylus suddenly released a flood of writing fluid that covered both his pad and his fingers,

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that somehow transferred itself to the clean uniform shirt that he had put on before coming on watch. Huygens could not help chuckling—and then added his own curses to the Mate's as the cigar that he had just lit exploded in his face. But things could have been worse, he reflected, much worse. The malicious entities released by the engineer could have played far rougher, could have injured and killed rather than merely annoyed.

And they might kill us yet, he thought soberly. *They might kill us yet. All they have to do is to see to it that we make a complete bollix of the landing . . .*

TO HANDLE the controls of a spaceship whilst keeping the fingers crossed might be thought to be completely impracticable. But Huygens did it. He was also chewing a clove of garlic, remembering that in olden times the fragrant bulb was thought to be a protection against werewolves. Not that the demons from Koraki were werewolves, but they were supernatural beings and Huygens was taking no chances. So *Barrow Boy* dropped through the atmosphere, wobbling drunkenly atop the pillar of flame that was her exhaust. Luckily, conditions were ideal; from stratospheric altitudes to ground level the atmosphere was calm. She staggered to a landing on a sandy plain outside a walled city, and it was not at all a bad landing, especially since the plain was by no means as level as it had appeared from the air, being littered with great boulders. But Huygens, more by luck than judgment, contrived to miss them all and there the ship sat, simmering in the cloud of dust and smoke raised by her descent. From the city walls men, armed and armored men, regarded her.

"This," said Huygens quietly, "is the end of the penny section."

Carradine grunted something in reply. He was busy using the big, mounted binoculars, training them through the thinning fumes, staring at the city.

He said, "Judging by the configuration of the coastline we must have come down somewhere on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean . . . And judging by the way those jokers are dressed, it must be one hell-uva long time ago . . ."

"And how are they dressed?" asked the Captain, somehow reluctant to unstrap himself from his chair.

"Conical, metal helmets . . . And on their bodies . . . Looks like plates of leather, with metal studs . . . And some of 'em have spears, and others have bows . . . Short ones. Vicious looking . . . Ah, the gates have opened . . . There's some sort of procession

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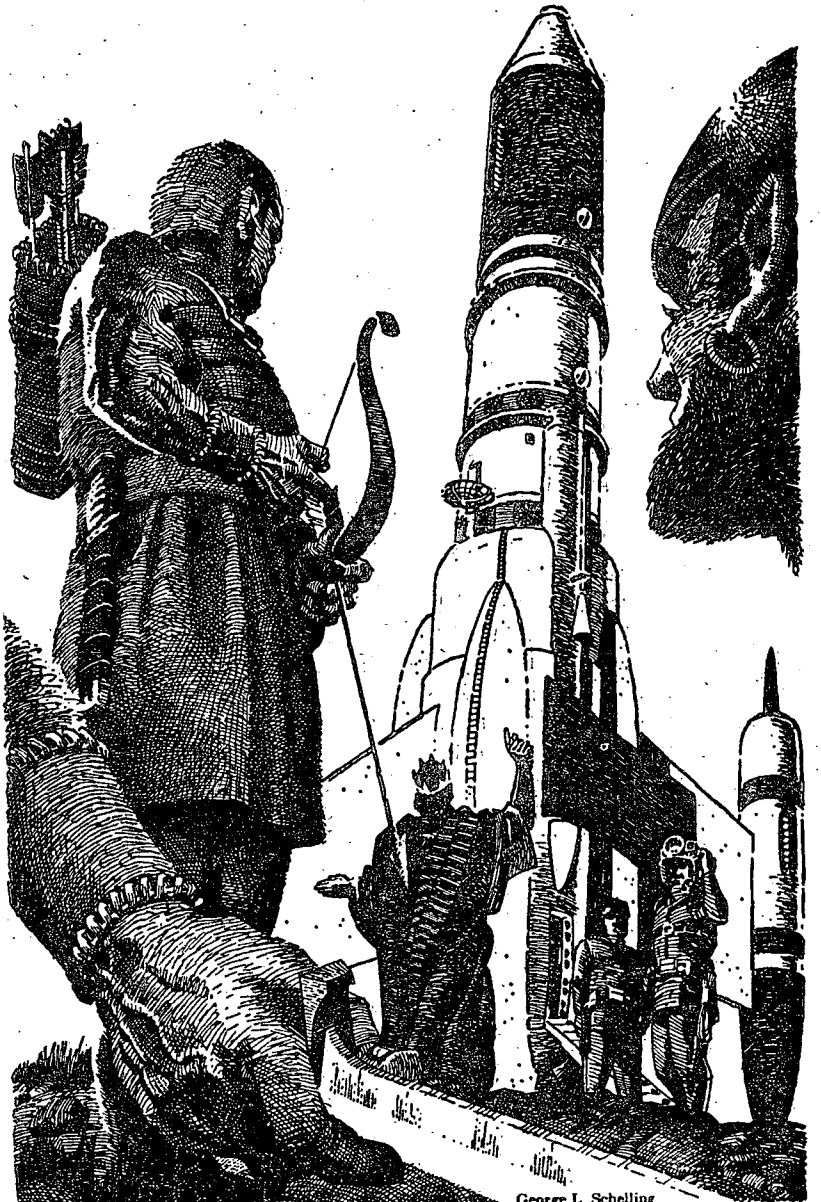

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coming out. There's a man riding on a camel, and the poor brute's loaded down with decorations like a Christmas tree . . . There're soldiers, some of 'em afoot and some on horseback . . ."

"Get out the psionic translator," ordered Huygens. "I'll put it on, and then you and I will go down to the after airlock to receive our visitors."

"Armed?"

"Of course. But I don't want any shooting."

Carradine opened the locker and took out the elaborate helmet, placed it on his Captain's head with all the care of an ecclesiastical dignitary crowning a monarch. He helped Huygens to his feet, assisted him out of the control room to the axial shaft (that helmet was heavy) pausing to call to the Second Mate, "Don't forget, you're in charge if anything happens to the Captain or myself."

The two officers took the elevator—it was little more than a platform for handling stores—down to after airlock level. Carradine went to the telephone by the inner door, called Control. "Is everything clear for opening?"

"Yes," came the Second Mate's voice. "Our visitors are keeping a respectful distance . . ."

Huygens gently pushed Carradine to one side, went to the telephone himself. "Any signs of missile weapons?" he asked.

"Missile weapons, sir?"

"Yes. Bows and arrows. Spears . . ." *And slings?* he wondered. *This must be about the place, is it the Time?*

There was a long pause, and then the Second Mate's voice, "No, sir. They don't seem to be hostile . . ."

"Yet . . ." muttered Carradine.

Huygens glared at him, then ordered, "Open up!"

"Shouldn't we test the air, check the pressure?" asked the Mate.

"No. It will be a damn sight purer than in our time."

PURER it might have been, but the breeze, what there was of it, was blowing directly from the city. There was the smell of rancid cooking oils, of dust with a high organic content, of camel. Huygens wrinkled his nostrils in distaste, then tried to ignore the stink. He strode down the extended ramp with Carradine at his side, wearing the helmet of the psionic translator as though it were a crown and he a king. He saw that the leader of the party from the city was wearing a real crown, a relatively simple affair of gold and bright stones. Huygens didn't let it worry him. Somebody had once said in his hearing that the Captains of interstellar tramps were arrogant

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men and Huygens had been pleased rather than displeased; it had never been his intention to be one of the exceptions that are alleged to prove the rule.

He heard the voice of the native monarch, heard the meaningless words. And he heard—although it was not real hearing—in his mind the words of the translation, oddly expressionless.

"Greetings." And then, at once, the question, "You are angels?"

Greetings, thought Huygens, and heard the alien syllables of the translation issuing from his mouth. *Greetings.* Then, reluctantly, *No, we are not angels.*

"Messengers? asked the King. *"Heavenly messengers?"*

Yes, replied Huygens truthfully.

"My city is yours. My palace is yours. Be pleased to leave your great sky chariot and come with me."

Huygens switched off the translator. "Royal invite," he said to Carradine.

"Are you accepting, Captain?"

"I'd better. And I'd like you to come with me, and the Purser. Nip back aboard and tell the Second Mate that he's in charge, and tell him to get the hell out in the event of trouble." He added unkindly, "It should be your job, but he's a better spaceman."

"I resent that," flared Carradine.

"He is a better spaceman—but you're a far better man to have around on the surface of an alien planet. And this planet *is* alien, even though it's Earth."

Carradine left his Captain making polite conversation with the King, hurried back up the ramp. He passed on the orders to the Second Mate and the Purser; then went to his cabin to pack hastily; he did not know how long a period the invitation covered. His own packing done he went into the Captain's quarters, threw tooth cleaning gear, a battery powered razor and a change of linen into a bag. He then joined the Purser at the airlock, marched with him down the ramp to the sand.

Huygens watched his officers approach, then said, "We've been offered transport—the choice between horses or camels. I refused."

"Thank Heaven for that," sighed the Purser, eyeing the animals dubiously.

"It would have been an experience," quibbled Carradine.

"One that I was not willing to undergo," snapped Huygens. "Now, if you gentlemen will follow me and try to look like officers . . ."

The King had dismounted from his camel, was standing not far from Huygens. At a word from him the horsemen wheeled, assembled in rough formation,

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galloped towards the huge, open gates. The foot soldiers fell in around their monarch and the party from the ship, started to march. Huygens and the officers fell into step with them. The King maintained his own pace. The camel trailed along behind.

As they passed through the narrow streets the Captain regretted that trading was not possible between centuries as well as between worlds. There would be so much that he could sell these people. *Weapons,* he thought. *There would be a big demand for weapons. These are a proud, warlike race. They must be a thorn in the side of all their neighbors . . .*

The Palace . . . The words formed themselves inside his brain.

So this was the palace, Huygens thought. He was disappointed. He had expected something on the lines of a minor, but ornate, skyscraper. This building, in places, rose as high as two stories, but the bulk of it was one storied only. Still, it covered a fair acreage.

Once inside Huygens discovered that its interior appointments were far more sumptuous than the somewhat drab exterior had led him to expect. There were long corridors with floors of highly polished timber, there were wall hangings of luxurious richness, there were shady courtyards in which fountains played, in which flourished trees and flowers.

And there were women.

There were women dark of skin and hair, there were blondes whose hair was almost as pale as their bodies, there were redheads. They wandered through the corridors, they splashed in the pools of the fountains, they made cursory obeisance to the King, stared with frank interest at the spacemen. Huygens blushed, paused to look round at the Mate and the Purser. The Purser, too, was embarrassed—but Carradine was not. Boldly he returned their stares. *I must warn him,* thought Huygens. *Even if a man has a thousand wives he will still take a dim view if one of them commits adultery . . .*

Then there was some sort of commotion in the distance, a disturbance whose focus approached rapidly. A man came running towards the party. He was dusty, sweaty, barefooted, panting heavily. He prostrated himself before the King, gasped something. Huygens was too late to focus the psionic translator on him.

The King dispelled his curiosity. He said, "A royal visit. The Queen of a country of which I have never heard approaches, with her train . . ."

Huygens' attention was dis-

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tracted by the behavior of the fountain close to which they were standing. The column of spray twisted, wavered, then directed itself at the King and his companions like the jet from a fire hose. If the jet had remained water it wouldn't have been so bad. But it was the consistency of glue and stank of very old fish.

"If there are demons here," sighed Carradine, "we brought 'em with us."

THERE were demons loose in the palace.

So far, nobody had connected their presence with the coming of the spacemen—or, perhaps, one and all were too polite to express their opinions. *But the King must suspect,* thought Huygens. *He's no fool. Perhaps he thinks that we've come to try him—as Job was tried. Or will be tried. I wish I could get my periods sorted out* . . . He took a sip from the goblet that he was holding, found that the wine had been turned to something looking like blood and tasting worse. He saw that the visiting Queen, the tall, brown skinned blonde with the strangely elaborate headdress, was looking at him amusedly. And he saw that Carradine, the Mate, was sitting far closer to the woman than court etiquette permitted and that the King, on her other side, was beginning to regard the spaceman with a certain hostility.

All this, and demons too, thought Huygens. A girl brought him another goblet and he gulped from it hastily before the invisible pests from Koraki could get at it. It wasn't very good wine, but it was an anaesthetic of sorts.

The King, glaring at the visiting Queen and at Carradine, rose to his feet. He was a small man, but his majesty made up for his lack of inches. He said to Huygens, "May I request a word with you, Messenger?"

"I am honored, King."

"Then let us go, where we may talk in private away from these chattering women."

If you collect 'em, thought Huygens, *you have to put up with 'em.*

But he rose to his feet, a little unsteadily, followed the monarch from the room. He paused at the doorway, looked back. The Purser was sitting glumly, notwithstanding the fact that two beautiful girls were bringing him relays of wine. Carradine, on the other hand, seemed to be carrying on an animated conversation with the statuesque blonde. *And he's not that good a linguist,* thought the Captain.

He walked with the King along one of the long corridors. Ahead of them, wet, filthy footprints

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appeared on the floor, marring its polish. Invisible, dirty hands were befouling the wall hangings. The King ignored these manifestations—and Huygens thought that he would be advised to ignore them too.

They came to a room—a small room with a floor of white marble, a floor on which a design of interlocking triangles, a conventional star, had been inlaid in black. In the center of the star—the pentacle?—was a table, on which stood a flagon of wine and two goblets, and a pair of scantily dressed maidens.

The King led Huygens to the table, sank into the larger and the more ornate of the two chairs, motioned to the spaceman to be seated. One of the girls filled the goblets, the other waved languidly with the large fan that she was holding. Huygens, after his companion had raised his own goblet to his lips, sipped his wine. It was good wine, like a slightly resinous Chianti. And it didn't change to anything else, and there was nothing swimming in it.

"IS THIS testing necessary?" demanded the King abruptly.

"What testing?"

The King laughed bitterly. "You ask that? Even I, a mere mortal, can grasp the implications of what is happening. Heavenly messengers drop down in flame and thunder—but they have no message. And then, almost coincident with their arrival, things start to happen. A series of fires in the city. The sudden drying up of wells. Minor miracles, such as turning the wine into water, and worse than water . . ." He drank thirstily from his goblet as though in search of reassurance. He remained silent for a while, thinking. Huygens didn't care at all for the intelligence evident in that dark, lean, bearded face. Then—"But are you *Heavenly* Messengers?" asked the King.

"Why do you ask?" countered Huygens.

The other man made a sweeping gesture to indicate the black pentagram on the white marble floor. "*That.* That is proof against devils—not against angels." His hand was far too close to the jewelled hilt of the sword that he was wearing. "And with devils I can cope."

"Can you, now?" asked Huygens, genuinely interested.

"Yes." The King was on his feet, his wine cup overset, his short sword drawn and ready. "Call off your imps of mischief, master magician. Not that it much matters. I can slay you now and deal with your servants later."

Huygens was standing too, his heavy automatic out. A pistol, even to those who have never

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seen one before, looks a wicked and lethal thing. Huygens took rapid and casual aim on a tall vase at the far corner of the room, fired. The report was deafening—and so was the crash of shattered earthenware. In a fraction of a second he had swung to cover the King once more.

The monarch was impressed, shaken, but not afraid. "More black arts," he said bitterly.

"No," Huygens corrected him. "Not black arts. This weapon is no more than a product of the science of my own place, my own Time. It does no more than make use of certain natural laws, just as a bow does. That is all."

"But it can kill?"

"Yes. It can kill. But, Your Majesty, rest assured that I shall never use it save in self defense."

"Sit down," said the King.

The two men sat.

"Wine," said the King.

One of the frightened girls refilled the goblets.

"I could use weapons such as that," said the King.

"I am a trader, Your Majesty," Huygens told him.

"What would you want?"

Huygens thought of all the things that would fetch fabulous prices if only he could transport them back to his own Time. But there was one thing more precious than anything in the palace, or the temple. The King, perhaps, would be able to give it to him. (Had he not said that he could cope with demons?) And that would be the clearing of all the malign entities from the ship and her vicinity. Once this had been achieved it might be possible, working undisturbed, to find some way of getting back.

"Let me tell you my story," said Huygens.

While the King listened intently, while the goblets were emptied and refilled, Huygens talked. He was fortunate that his listener was a man whose reputation for wisdom had endured even to Huygens' day. Then, the story told, there was silence for a while.

"I believe you," said the King at last. "And you must have many wonders aboard your ship. May I visit her?"

THE next few days were busy ones.

The ghost traps were unloaded again, assembled and baited. But, this time, there were authorities on hand who knew what to do with a captured demon. Heavy earthenware jars were brought in by the score and somehow—Huygens was never able to make out the muttered words, never able to remember the passes made by the hands—the demons were transferred to the jars. As each jar was filled, a soft clay stopper was rammed into its mouth and a heavy seal, bearing

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the pentagram, was pressed to the soft material.

The King—who, apparently, was the only person who could use the seal—worked like a navvy. So did Huygens and his people—with one exception. That exception was the Mate. He seemed to have vanished. The Captain was not worried; he had known Carradine to vanish before.

The ghost catching was almost over when he turned up.

He knocked at the door of Huygens' cabin just as the shipmaster was sitting down to a hasty meal. With him was the tall blonde, the woman from some strange and far country, the Queen whose crown, Huygens suddenly realised, bore a marked resemblance to the helmet of a psionic translator.

"Eve," said Carradine, "this is Captain Huygens. Sir, this is Eve . . ."

"No," said Huygens. "No. That would be too much. And it would be all wrong, chronologically speaking . . ."

"What are you talking about, sir? Eve is leader of the Biblical Research Expedition sent back in Time by the Magravin Sorority. It seems that her people—they're our remote descendants—have Time Travel. She says that she can fix our Mannschenn Drive Unit so that it will take us back—or ahead?—to where we belong . . ."

"Get hold of the Interstellar Chief!" snapped Huygens, his lunch forgotten. "Get hold of all the engineers. Tell them there's work to be done."

"Mr. Carradine and I will install the Selector," said the woman coolly. "And I warn you, Captain, any attempt to interfere with it, to open it up, will result in its self destruction. It will destroy itself, in any case, once it has returned you to your own Time."

"But the possibilities of trade . . ." muttered Huygens.

"And the probabilities of switching the world on to another Time Track," said the woman even more coolly. "I need hardly tell you, Captain, that everything you have given to His Majesty will be destroyed, by us. We are conservators as well as explorers. So, while Peter and I do what has to be done to your Mannschenn Drive unit, you carry on with whatever it was that you were doing." She smiled sardonically. "Happy hunting!"

SO, NOT the next day but the day after, *Barrow Boy* lifted on the long, incandescent column of her exhaust, lifted and, once she was clear of the atmosphere, went into orbit about the planet. Then her Mannschenn Drive was switched on and she vanished—but although the Drive was working it was working in a way

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that it had never been intended to work.

A timejammer, they say, goes ahead in Space whilst going astern in Time.

Not so (on this one occasion only) *Barrow Boy*. She didn't go ahead in Space at all—but she went ahead in Time. Her crew, during this strange voyage, were unconscious. (Had they retained consciousness, Carradine told them afterwards, the psychological ageing would have killed them.) Some of them woke up just in time to hear the sharp report as the so-called Selector in the Mannschenn Drive room blew up.

The Earth above which the ship hung in orbit was familiar enough. It was their Earth. And the Mate's girlfriend hadn't perpetrated any paradoxes; the ship had not returned to her home planet before she left or anything absurd like that. She had arrived at exactly the time she would have arrived had she not made her detour in Time.

Traffic was heavy at Port Woomera, however, and berthage limited, so she had to wait her turn, staying in orbit until given permission to descend. People passed the time in various ways —sleep being the most popular.

Huygens did not sleep.

He found, in the ship's library, a copy of the Bible. He was read-

(Continued on page 130)

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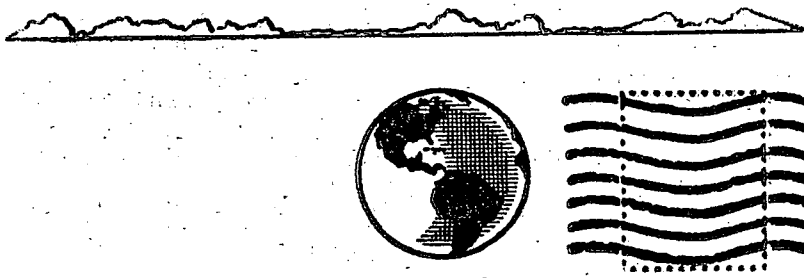

According to you...

Dear Editor:

It has been ten years or more since I have taken typewriter in hand to communicate to a science-fantasy magazine; not since, in fact, the Golden Age of the late Forties (I must say, in all vanity, that I was in my teens then—it does sound so long ago). My reading in the field has been sporadic since then and nothing has inspired me to take the energy to voice enthusiasm or digust. But your May issue did just that—and guess which feeling was aroused? Needless to say, it was positive. And at the sight of that long neglected institution, a readers column, I felt an impulse from the past and here is the result.

Specifically, it was Mr. Leiber's charming "Scylla's Daughter" that roused me to action. I had missed the Gray Mouser stories that appeared formerly and do regret it now. And I certainly hope there are more to come. The combination of a Robert Howard thud and blunder world with the tongue in cheek humor of a de Camp is completely irresistible—and a huzzah for Mr. Leiber's fresh and individual writing style. Please, more stories of worlds only tenuously connected with ours.

As for Mr. Howard's story, I must admit that I couldn't get through it (now that I think of it, I've had that problem with him before. Where *does* his reputation come from?).

In your reprint series, may I suggest stories from a collection by Jack Vance called "The Dying Earth"—quite good, well worth reprinting and right up your alley—or what I hope your alley is.

Only one more subject and I'll stop blathering—art work, which to me is a most important part of any magazine. Your May cover was

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admirable—*and* accurate, not just an attention getter—but the interiors are just adequate. I know the complications of publishing, but is there any chance of seeing Virgil Finlay appearing in FANTASTIC? Preferably with his old style intact? And I would give my eye teeth to see work by Ed Cartier or best of all, Hannes Bok. Also, would it be permissable to ask, via the letter column, if anyone has originals by these artists for sale or knows where I might get in touch with them?

Thank you, sir, for more enjoyment than I've gotten from a magazine in many a day. I shall buy the next issue, and I hope for both of us, many more after that.

Bill Searles
182 W. 82 St.
New York 24, N.Y.

● *It's heartening to know that the efforts to get good fantasy—art and words—sometimes pay off. We hope to continue meriting your enthusiasm. Some of the original art work is for sale via auctions at the regional and international SF conventions.*

Dear Editor:

I would like to compliment you on the charming story, "Scylla's Daughter," by Fritz Leiber, which appeared in the May issue, and on the equally charming cover which illustrated it. I do not think that Summers' style in the inside illustrations suited the story as well as did Kramer's cover.

To coin a phrase, I thought it was a truly Fantastic Story of Imagination.

I wonder if anybody has ever thought of making a full-length animated cartoon science fiction story. Wouldn't this be a great plot for it? Animals and space-time machine and a real dragon. . . .

I hope you do this again soon. I will be watching for it.

Ann DuFresne
5712 S. Maryland Ave.
Chicago 37, Illinois

● *Well, this is probably the first time anybody called a dragon "charming," but ladies are entitled to their adjectival choices—and we're glad you enjoyed it.*

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Dear Editor:

WOW ! ! ! ! What an issue ! Y'know I never enjoyed a fantasy mag so much for a long, long time.

Only one complaint. I didn't like that cover. As for the rest it was just right.

I am a big Robert E. Howard fan, and I've been after that story of his for a long time. How about printing some of his other stories? the ones that are not seen much, like King Kull, and so on.

I also have a great liking for Jack Sharkey. His humor, mixed with just a dash of sex is first rate. Normally, I don't like love interest in fantasy or sf, but Sharkey has a touch which I really think is good.

I liked the Leiber tale too. And the Porges Vampire yarn was really up to the minute.

Pat(rick) J. Kearney
33 Elizabeth Street
London, S.W.1.

• *More Howard in the future, we promise. How come you didn't like the cover, when the lady preceding you thought it was charming?*

Dear Editor:

The June 1961 FANTASTIC was a good if unspectacular issue, and Mack Reynold's "I.Q." was one of the better stories in it. However, at the top of page 76 Reynolds makes an error that I think should be corrected. He refers to "*Lord* Byron and *Baron* Shelley"; and I think it should be pointed out that, while Byron was a Lord all right, Shelley was never a Baron. The root of this error probably lies in the fact that Shelley was *heir* to a Baronetcy at one time; however, he forfeited his succession rights in—I believe—1817, in return for a larger immediate income which he used to pay off his own debts and those of his philosopher father-in-law, William Godwin. Raynolds' point is well-taken, however, in that Shelley's family *was* wealthy; their fortune amounted to about £100,000—$10- to $15,000,000 by today's standards.

Julian Reid
322 Plaskett Place
Victoria, B.C., Canada

• *Thank you for the noble facts. If you have a bunch of millions, what's a baronetcy between friends?*

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Dear Editor:

This is a letter written in reply to the inane babbling of Mrs. Stewart. It is also a tribute to David R. Bunch.

Comprehensive and intelligent criticism has long been indicative of the mature mind. There appears intermittently in your lettercol a type of letter specializing in extreme adulation or condemnation; immaturity prevails. In her comments on the work of Bunch, Mrs. Stewart establishes her inability to discuss introspectively. I sincerely desire that Mrs. Stewart, in the near future, reevaluates the worth of constructive criticism.

In the American theatre Eugene O'Neill and Thornton Wilder were among the first to incorporate innovations and gimmicks in their plays. At this late date there are yet many Americans who lack the capabilities to recognize the full potential of these two playwrights. The numerous awards—two Pulitzers apiece and the Nobel Prize for O'Neill—presented them substantiates their greatness. But in the beginning they were beset by severe criticism and disbelief of their abilities. However, their greatness eventually triumphed over the derision and contempt of the critics.

David R. Bunch can be compared (not in stature) to O'Neill and Wilder. Bunch has been subjected to derision and has been ignored for the most part by the genre. It is my belief that his superlative work cannot be overlooked.

To the best of my knowledge, Bunch made his sf debut in If circa 1957. Two years later he contributed a short-short to AMAZING. He has since appeared in both Z-D magazines regularly; his satire has graced your magazines a dozen or so times since 1959. Perhaps the most delightful fantasy to appear in your mags were his tales of life in Moderan.

His future is uncertain, it is evident that he does not devote enough time to literary endeavors.

Christopher Greco
Birmingham, Mich.

● *What, are we developing Bunchophiles and Bunchophobes, with Moderan now practically giving up the ghost to the metal-eaters?*

Dear Editor:

Having been an avid reader of SF for over twenty years, I think my opinions might be of some worth too.

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Recently I bought a copy of FANTASTIC because I enjoy the works of Fritz Leiber. His Scylla's Daughter was a really enjoyable piece; Fritz has quite a sense of humor. As you know, though, he is capable of very serious and suspense-filled novels too, such as "Conjure Wife" which was even adapted to TV.

My purpose in writing this is not only to praise Mr. Leiber, but to also recommend that you print long stories in serial form. Remember your glorious books of the 1940's, with novels of 100,000 words? ASTOUNDING and GALAXY made their name by printing serials by the masters. You can do the same. Go to it!

Richard Speltz
4543 N. Albany St.
Chicago, Ill.

• *For the readers who've been complaining about 60,000 word serials, what you suggest would be a major catastrophe!*

Dear Editor:

It is a very rare circumstance when I sit down and write an editor of a science-fiction magazine a letter of commendation for printing a story but I felt I must do this the moment I finished Estelle Frye's *The Face in the Mask*. Your round-robin novelet, *The Covenant* prompted the same action and I can only say this story by Estelle Frye surpasses the novelet in many ways. I sincerely believe it is one of the best pieces of fantasy you have ever published and this, plus the E. F. Russell reprint, puts your June issue ahead of any of your competitors.

I really am looking forward to your fantasy classic series and hope you will find the space for a little-known Lovecraft story now and then, although I certainly can't complain about *The Cosmic Relic* and *The Garden of Fear*.

Thank you for a fine magazine.

E. J. Brunner
Box 187
Talcottville, Connecticut

• *We thought we were going out on an editorial limb by buying a story from an unknown and touting it as one of the best SF stories we'd ever read, but this kind of reaction—and it is only one of many such letters—reassures us, and pleases Mrs. Frye.*

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THE GENIE

(Continued from page 123)

ing it, from the Old Testament, when Carradine came to see him.

"There's something wrong," Huygens complained. "She's not mentioned at all."

"Who's not mentioned?"

"That blonde. Eve. The one called the Queen of Margavin."

"Why should she have been?"

"The Queen of Sheba gets a good write-up. And the King, it was obvious, had a weakness for the fair sex . . ."

"Yes, didn't he? But perhaps he recorded only his conquests."

"And that's what I can't understand," grumbled Huygens. "You may be one of the more notorious tom cats in Space, but you're not royalty. The King had it all over you as far as looks, manners, sex appeal. After all, a man who can keep a thousand wives happy *has* something . . ."

"He was too busy catching ghosts," said Carradine smugly.

THE END

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"The butterfly people swooped upon the male, bending and bucking above his falling figure, gorgeous wings scintillating with the colors of the rainbow, a hideous commingling of beauty and horror."
(See *Magnanthropus*)

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